



Heidegger, Neoplatonism, and the History of Being

Relation as Ontological Ground

James Filler

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To my wife, Amy, and my mother, Edelize. Without their support and encouragement this work would not have been possible. I love you Amy, my Beloved, and I love and miss you, Mom. I wish you could have waited to see me finish.

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Clichés become clichés precisely because they have a universal truth about them which easily and often gets forgotten. So while it is a cliché to say that no work of this type and magnitude could be accomplished in isolation, it is, as the cliché would suggest, absolutely and unequivocally true for me here. And given that the nature of this work is such that the fundamental nature of reality is herein claimed to be relational, it would be especially egregious if at the same time I were to claim that very work to be completely independent and solely the result of my own labor and thought. No one who has come into my life has failed to impact this work in significant ways, and nothing of any worth could be found here without their influence. Their number is almost infinite. Some have contributed in large obvious ways and others in smaller subtler ways. It is often, however, the small subtle contributions that often have the greater, though less obvious, impact. Such is certainly the case here. I am grateful beyond words to all of them. They all deserve to be credited, and I'm sure there are many important people I will overlook.

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Finally, again it's cliché, but it would be a grave error to forget the One without Whom nothing is possible.

These are my speculations. While I certainly hope and pray that they are consistent with and perhaps even reflect the teachings of the Orthodox Church, they have not been approved by any authority in the Church. If there is any error in them, I ask forgiveness, recant, and repent. If there is any truth or wisdom, it belongs to God alone. May He have mercy on me and on us all.

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PART I

Μογή: Origins of Being; The One



CHAPTER 1

Beginnings

INTRODUCTION: HISTORY, WE HAVE A PROBLEM!

From its inception, metaphysics has been haunted by a fundamentally singular problem, which manifests historically in two ways. In ancient, pre-modern times, it is primarily a metaphysical problem—is Being One or Many. If Being is primarily one, then how do we account for the multiplicity that we see and experience? If Being is fundamentally many, then how can there be any stability, that is, identity, which is required both for knowledge to be possible and for things to exist as things? After the turn to modernity, after Descartes, the problem becomes epistemological, manifesting itself as the problem of Subject/Object Dualism. If knowledge is primarily the function of the subjective consciousness of a rational agent, then how can we bridge the gap between the subjective realm of the knower and the objective world of the known? This is fundamentally, however, still a metaphysical problem. Even though it has now taken on the form of epistemology, it is a question about the nature of reality and arises from a misunderstanding of Being as “substance”. It is this tradition of the “ontology of substance” that Heidegger criticizes so sharply in his analysis of the Cartesian *res extensa*:

Substantiality is the idea of Being to which the ontological characterization of the *res extensa* harks back. “*Per substantiam nihil aliud intelligere possumus, quam rem quae ita existit, ut nulla alia re indigeat ad existendum.*” “By

substance we can understand nothing else than an entity which is in such a way that it needs no other entity in order to be.” The Being of a ‘substance’ is characterized by not needing anything.¹

Heidegger then states, “The critical question now arises: does this ontology of the ‘world’ seek the phenomenon of the world at all, and if not, does it at least define some entity within-the-world fully enough so that the worldly character of this entity can be made visible in it? *To both questions we must answer ‘No’.*”² In both cases, the problem arises from the question: What is the source of Being, and how is this source, and consequently Being itself, to be understood?

The history of philosophy gives us two radically different answers to this question. One has long dominated philosophical investigation and discourse, while the other has been, for the most part, confined to the arcane teachings of obscure philosophers, dismissed as too esoteric to be considered metaphysically respectable, or at the very least too ignorant of and contradictory to contemporary “enlightened” modes of thought to be relevant. The first follows the path of Aristotle by whom Being is seen as independent and separate and through whom the ontology of substance develops. It is this path that predominates historically. The other path follows the Neoplatonists who, developing hints found in Plato, see Being in relational terms. It is this relational tradition of ontology which Heidegger recovers and which provides a solution to the metaphysical problems mentioned above.

It is true that a dynamic view of Being is enjoying something of a resurgence in Process philosophy, but Process thought has not, as yet, become the metaphysically dominant view, and further, even Process thought does not give relationality the ontological primordality it is due. Thinkers such as Rescher, Niemoczynski, Benjamin, and, of course, Whitehead all

¹Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 125.

²Ibid., 128 (emphasis in the original).

recognize the limits of substance ontology and seek to replace it with a relational understanding.³ Rescher makes this explicit:

As is often the case in philosophy, the position at issue is best understood in terms of what it opposes. From the time of Aristotle, Western metaphysics has had a marked bias in favor of *things*. Aristotle's insistence on the metaphysical centrality of ostensibly indicatable objects (with *tode ti* as a pointable—at *this*) made an enduring and far-reaching impact. In fact, it does not stretch matters unduly to say that the Aristotelian view of the primacy of substance and its ramifications (see *Metaphysics* IV, 2, 10003b6–11)—with its focus on midsize physical objects on the order of a rock, tree, cat, or human being—have proved to be decisive for much of Western philosophy.⁴

Nevertheless, Process thought is still as yet dominated by a fundamentally “substantial” view of metaphysics insofar as it understands “relation” in the Aristotelian *πρός τι* sense in which relation is founded upon relata rather than relata being grounded in relation. Process thought has, therefore, not yet managed to divorce itself fully from the metaphysics of substance.

Zizioulas, while not strictly a philosopher but a theologian, has something of an ontologically relational grasp insofar as he understands God in terms of “Communion”. He goes so far as to assert, “It would be unthinkable to speak of the ‘one God’ before speaking of the God who is ‘communion,’ that is to say, of the Holy Trinity.”⁵ This, however, is a relationality which is not ontologically primary itself but still grounded on relata. In this case, the relata upon which communion is grounded is the Father. His understanding of God is more about the freedom of the Father to establish Himself in relation to the other Persons of the Trinity than on any

³ See Rescher, Nicholas, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000); Rescher, Nicholas, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Niemoczynski, Leon, “Ecology Re-naturalized”, in *A Philosophy of Sacred Nature*, ed. Leon Niemoczynski and Nam T. Nguyen (New York: Lexington Books, 2015); Benjamin, Andrew, *Towards a Relational Ontology: Philosophy's Other Possibility* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015); Whitehead, Alfred North, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1985). All of these thinkers will be discussed in more depth in the Conclusion, but they deserve to be noted here.

⁴ Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*, 4.

⁵ Zizioulas, John D., *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 17.

ontologically primary relationality itself. He states, “The fact that God exists because of the Father shows that His existence, His being is the consequence of a free person; which means, in the last analysis, that not only communion but also *freedom*, the free person, constitutes true being. *True being comes only from the free person*, from the person who loves freely—that is, who freely affirms his being, his identity, by means of an event of communion with other persons”⁶ (bold italicized emphasis added). Zizioulas, therefore, grounds his understanding in the Father, Who freely establishes and determines the being of Himself as well as other entities, first and foremost, the other Persons of the Trinity. This “being” is relational, but it is a relationality founded upon an Aristotelian *πρός τι* notion of relation by which the Father is the relata upon Whom the relationality of Being is founded.

Yannaras comes closest to a truly relational ontology with his understanding of God, the “Causal Principle” of Being, as “personal”, correspondingly understanding “person” as “relation”.⁷ Yet he goes no further, failing to apply this “relational ontology” to nonpersonal entities, as the Process thinkers do.

So while there is a recognized problem with substance ontology and an attempt to uncover relationality as an alternate metaphysical understanding, a truly relational ontology with its full implications has yet to be fully appreciated and realized. That is the task here, and to accomplish this, it is necessary to consider both how these alternate ontological understandings developed historically and how Heidegger begins a recovery of ontological relationality.

THE BEGINNING

In the beginning, there was ... Being. This must be the case in order for there to be anything at all. Reality itself depends on there having been “something” in the beginning. The ancient principle *ex nihil nihil fit* demands it.⁸ The alternative is a reality that is irrational and contradictory.

⁶Ibid., 18. It is worth noting that this has more in common with existentialism than a true relational ontology.

⁷Yannaras, Christos, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, trans. Norman Russell (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), 136, 152. He will be discussed in more detail in the examination of “Personhood” in the Conclusion.

⁸“Out of nothing, nothing arises” This principle can be traced all the way back to the earliest days of philosophy. In Parmenides’ poem, the possibility of Being arising from Nothing is explicitly denied as irrational, a logical contradiction. (See Parmenides Poem Fr. 8 5–21; Kirk, G. S., Raven, J. E., and Schofield, M., *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 249–250.)

The principle itself, however, is already the development of a philosophical, or *logo*-centric, mode of thought—one in which reality itself is subject to the rational capacities of a rational agent. Western thought has generally accepted that it is with the beginning of the separation of *mythos* and *logos* that a “philosophical” mode of thinking begins to arise,⁹ and while pre-philosophical modes of thought (mythopoeic modes of thought in which *logos* and *mythos* have not yet been separated) do deal with the origins of the world and even recognize implicitly this principle—everything that exists came from something¹⁰—they seem to ignore the question of Being per se, that is, Being as something which underlies and grounds the things that exist. In the rationalistic, *logo*-centric mode of thought, one would say they ignore Being as an “abstract concept”. This is not to say they ignore the realities of life, but they are either reluctant or incapable of examining the nature of Being itself. This is not surprising if Hans Blumenberg is correct in his assessment of the role of myth. In his *Work on Myth*, Blumenberg claims that the purpose of myth is to distance man from the “absolutism of reality”, by which is understood the situation in which “man comes close to not having control of the conditions of his existence and, what is more important, believes that he simply lacks control over them”.¹¹ It, myth, allows man to distance himself from the conditions of

⁹ Philip Rosemann makes the point that the separation of myth and reason is a central and defining characteristic of Western civilization, and with it early Greek thought. He notes that for the Greeks prior to the eighth century BC, there was no distinction between “*mythos*” and “*logos*”, that is, between myth and reason, and myth didn’t carry the pejorative burden of the “absurd” or “false” as it came to in Western, especially contemporary Western, thought. (Rosemann, Philipp, *Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 48–50.) While the antagonistic understanding of the relation between *mythos* and *logos* has become common in Western thought, an articulate critique of this understanding, which we will briefly examine, exists in Stambovsky, Phillip, *Myth and the Limits of Reason*, Revised ed. (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004).

¹⁰ David Leeming lists five types of creation myths: Ex Nihilo, Creation from Chaos, World Parent, Emergence, and Earth-Diver. The only two that might seem to violate this principle are Ex Nihilo and Creation from Chaos, but as Leeming makes clear, in creation ex nihilo the central fact of this type of creation account is a Creator “existing alone in a pre-creation emptiness or void, who consciously creates an organized universe on his own”, and creation from chaos involves some eternal matter which, while often indefinite and indeterminate, yet contains the potentiality from creation within it. So in neither case is the principle of origin “nothing”. (Leeming, David A., *Creation Myths of the World: An Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 2–15.)

¹¹ Blumenberg, Hans, *Work on Myth*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1985), 3–4.

the reality that surrounds him, to flee in the face of reality. While this is not an avoidance of Being per se, it does create a situation in which the inquiry into the nature of Being is problematic. In order to understand the nature of reality one must contemplate the conditions of reality. This cannot be done if one flees from such conditions.

Whether or not myth is a means by which man copes with anxiety in the face of Reality, as Blumenberg asserts, it is clear that the preoccupation with the realities of life prevented the development of a philosophical approach to Being. As Aristotle himself recognizes, it is when one is free from the necessities of life that a philosophical mode of thinking can arise.¹² And so it is certainly the case that it is not until man has overcome and conquered, to some degree, the vicissitudes of life that the question of Being can even begin to be asked, much less answered.¹³ And so it is only then that the modes of thought necessary to contemplate Being can arise. Thus, if it is the case, as it seems to be, that man's earliest conceptions lack both an understanding of Being per se and even any attempt at such understanding, then perhaps our original claim is false; perhaps in the beginning, there simply...was. This would certainly be more accurate, at least from the perspective of human cognition. It is only with the rise of both leisure time and, correspondingly, a philosophical perspective that the question of Being can become a question at all, and thus, the investigation into the question of Being proper can begin.

¹² Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols., vol. 2, Bollingen Series LXXI 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984). *Metaphysics*, I(A).1. "Hence when all such inventions [those that serve pleasure and the necessities of life] were already established, the sciences which do not aim at giving pleasure or at the necessities of life were discovered, and first in the places where men first began to have leisure. This is why the mathematical arts were founded in Egypt; for there the priestly caste was allowed to be at leisure" (981b19–24).

¹³ Stambovsky's assertion that myth and discursive reasoning are complementary may offer interesting insight here as well. The question of Being only arises once the move from mythopoeic reasoning to *logo*-centric reasoning is made. *Logo*-centric thinking, with its ability to grasp the abstract is also necessary. In reality, the question of Being cannot arise if one is limited to non-discursive depictive thought. This is because no question can be asked from a non-discursive perspective. There is no reasoning process, so one can't move from question to answer, from problem to solution. Maybe philosophical reasoning is a development of instrumental reasoning, for example, "How do I get my crops to grow better?" Instrumental reasoning is discursive, and when discursive reasoning attains the leisure to ask more abstract questions, we get philosophical reasoning, and then the question of Being arises. Stambovsky's view of the complementarity of non-discursive and discursive reasoning is, from the point of view of answering philosophical questions at least, correct.

THE PROBLEM

It is a testimony to Aristotle's genius that his perspective has, to this day, dominated discussion on the subject of both relation and being; however, this perspective leads to serious difficulties.¹⁴ In *Categories* 7, Aristotle says, "We call relatives [πρός τι] all such things as are said to be just what they are, of or than other things, or in some other way in relation to something else" (6a37–38).¹⁵ And in *Categories* 5, Aristotle states "that which is called a substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all—is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject" (2a11–13).¹⁶ Further, in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, after defining substance as "that which is not predicated of a subject, but of which all else is predicated" (1029a8–9), Aristotle clarifies, "both separability and individuality are thought to belong chiefly to substance" (1029a28).¹⁷ These passages show: (1) that substance, or "being" (οὐσίᾳ), is understood fundamentally as independent existence and (2) that relation is primarily grounded in the things it relates, the relata. These conceptions, however, are problematic.¹⁸

In the passage from *Being and Time* cited above, Heidegger identifies the traditional ontology of substance with what he calls "presence-at-hand" which, for Heidegger, cannot be ontologically primary, since this would render access to beings "within-the-world" problematic. According to Heidegger, this traditional ontology, by its very nature, has determined that the way to access entities is through understanding.¹⁹ This becomes a problem since understanding is always the understanding of some subject, and so access to something which exists independently, that is, some object, becomes difficult. Thus, the problem of Subject/Object dualism arises.

¹⁴ Much of the following argument is adapted from Filler, James, "Relationality as the Ground of Being: The One as Pure Relation in Plotinus", *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* 13, no. 1 (2019).

¹⁵ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols., vol. 1, Bollingen Series LXXI 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁸ This is not to suggest that this understanding of these concepts, that is, relations as determined by relata and substance as independent existence, originated with Aristotle. The Greek designation for relation, "πρός τι" ("toward something"), already indicates a relation that is primordially directed toward some thing, and the notion of Being as independent rests firmly on the Parmenidean ground of Being as one, simple, and unchanging. It would be inaccurate to say that Being is "independent" for Parmenides only because there is literally "nothing" for it to be independent from.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 129.

Two things should be noted here. First, it is true that Heidegger in these passages is primarily criticizing Descartes, but as he notes, the problem really lies in the traditional ontology of substance upon which Descartes' philosophy rests. Second, many ancient philosophers, Plato and Plotinus particularly, also confine Being to the realm of the Intellect, but this is not a problem (or not the same kind of problem), since Intellect is not primarily the Intellect of a subject, but rather is a supreme over-arching principle which brings all things to being—or perhaps better, brings Being to all things. The problem still might exist in the form “How does anything exist outside the Intellect?”, but ultimately for philosophers such as Plotinus and Plato, nothing truly does. The duality of subject-object, and so the dilemma, doesn't arise. However, the same problem on a metaphysical level does: the One-Many Problem.

The understanding of substance as independent existence also raises problems for the concept of relation. This is evidenced by the confusing account of “relation” described by Cavernos in his examination of the theory of relations found in Plato, Aristotle, and Aquinas. He concludes that, according to the classical theory of relations, relation “inheres in the referent”, but at the same time it is not “a quality or quantity of a thing”.²⁰ At the same time that it “inheres” in one of the terms of the relation, it is also something “a thing has ‘towards’ another”, concluding, “With respect to its being, a relation inheres in the referent; with respect to essence, however, it holds from the referent to the relatum.”²¹ Thus, he claims it resides both in one of the terms and apart from the terms as something “between” or “towards” one of them. This leads to the conclusion: “The relation inheres in the referent in an unique and indefinable way—a way very different from that in which qualitative or quantitative characteristics inhere in things.”²² Relation inheres in one of the terms but in a strange and mysterious way different from the way anything else inheres in a thing, and at the same time, as something “towards” a thing, it must exist in some sense apart from the referent as something grounded in both the referent and the relatum. If its existence is grounded in the referent, then it would need nothing else for its existence. If it requires

²⁰ Cavernos, Constantine, *The Classical Theory of Relations* (Belmont, Massachusetts: The Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 1975), 104.

²¹ Ibid., 19–20.

²² Ibid., 104.

something outside the referent to exist, then what sense does it make to say it exists *in* the referent? Cavernos leaves this paradox unresolved.

As long as one insists on a substance ontological perspective, the ground of relationality will always be confusion, and one will fail to grasp the essential relationality of determinate being, that is, substance, itself. The question of where relationality is grounded must be answered by recognizing the ground of relation as lying outside of and independent from the relata. But if this is not to reduce relationality itself to some entity, with its own substantial existence independent of anything related to it (certainly it is an obvious contradiction to say that relation itself exists independently of relations),²³ then this in turn entails an ontology in which relationality is ontologically prior to substance, an ontology in which Relation Itself is the ontological ground of substance.²⁴

If we understand relation as primarily grounded in the relata, and these relata are independently existing substances, then the notion of relationship itself becomes difficult. Where does the relation reside? It cannot

²³ It may seem that this is precisely what I am arguing, but it is not. Pure Relation itself seeks relata. Even though it is the ground of relata and ontologically prior to relata, it nevertheless seeks and desires something to relate. It needs relata, in some sense, for completeness. What this entails is that Pure Relation, ontologically prior Relationality, needs relata that are themselves Relations, and not substantial. And just as any relation entails at least two relata, Pure Relation, in its perfection, consists of three elements: Relationality Itself and two purely relational Relata. This, however, does not entail the Pure Relation is imperfect or is lacking. I hope to explain this more clearly when Personhood as self-relation is discussed, particularly as it is manifested in the Christian Neoplatonists.

²⁴ It needs to be remembered, however, that Cavernos is talking about particular, that is, determinate, relation, for example, large/small, and not Relation Itself or Pure Relation. This confused account of relations can be resolved if, as I stated above, we recognize that Pure Relation underlies and grounds determinate being itself. And since determination is itself relational and grounded ontologically in relationality (a preview of this argument was presented in the section above and a more detailed argument follows below), it logically follows that as Pure Relation gives rise to determinate being, it also gives rise to determinate or particular relations. This helps clarify the difficulty Socrates had in *Phaedo* with things becoming large and small by the same thing or becoming what they are by their opposites (see *Phaedo* 96eff.). If Pure Relation is itself indeterminate, then it would be necessary that all relations would contain some indeterminateness, and so this is manifested in the fact that particular relations are themselves somewhat indeterminate, that is, the same thing can be both large and small. Something is never simply large or small, but every entity, every determinate thing, is incomplete in itself; it is determined by something outside of itself. All particularity, whether it be particular relations, for example, large/small, left/right, or up/down, or particular things, that is, entities, contain some indeterminateness. Thus there is an ambiguity, an unknowableness, in everything.

reside in either entity independent of the other or else the other becomes an unnecessary participant in the relation. If that which gives rise to the relationship, whatever the relationship might be, resides in one particular entity, then no other entities are necessary for the relationship. This is necessary even in the case of self-relations, since what we are generally referencing when we talk about *self*-relations is the relation of a whole to its parts. It makes little sense to call simple unity, that is, a unity that lacks parts, self-related. If the relationship arises from the combination of the two entities, but does not exist independently of the entities, then something must be added to the entities which does not exist in either entity by itself. Otherwise, all that is necessary for a relationship to arise resides in each entity independently, and this is no different than if the relation derives from the single entity by itself. Thus, relation must exist independently of relata for there to be any relation at all.²⁵ Here one might object that relations do, in fact, arise from the two entities and do not have to exist independently of the entities. For example, the presence of difference sizes in different objects gives rise to small and large. The object by itself is small (or large), and so when another large object also exists, then we get smaller and larger. So relation does arise simply from the two entities and no third thing is necessary. But the issue here is size. If we quantify some size as “small” or “large”, we have already added a relation to it. But to say an object is “small” makes no sense unless there are other objects relative to it which are larger. So the object, by itself, cannot be small. And likewise it cannot be large. It simply has size. The relation between different sizes is already relational and can’t exist in either object independently (i.e., as just noted, a single object by itself is neither small nor large), and since it cannot exist in either object independently, it cannot exist in *both* independently. Why? Because if it exists in each *independently*, then it exists in the object alone, that is, independent of the other object, by definition, and then the object, by itself, is smaller, which is incoherent. This does not, however, necessarily refute the understanding of relation as grounded in relata. It merely establishes that relation, *qua* relation, must exist independently of the relata.

²⁵ Plato himself recognizes this and, in the *Timaeus*, states, “But it isn’t possible to combine two things well all by themselves, without a third; there has to be some bond between the two that unites them” (31b9–c2). It is true that Plato is here talking about the Demiurge’s mixing fire and earth to create the world’s body, but his point is a general one and, I believe, can be applied more broadly. (Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are from Plato, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997).)

To establish the primary existence of relation, prior to its relata, we must go further, and to do this, we must recognize that without relation as a third thing between two entities, neither entity can exist. Some relation is necessary for there to be entities at all. This is not a new problem. It is simply a restatement of the classic One-Many problem: Is Being primarily One, which then gives rise to multiplicity, or is it primarily Many, which then gives rise to unity? Neither seems possible, and so we find ourselves in a metaphysical quandary, since it seems necessary that Being be either one or many.

Could Being possibly be neither one nor many? Plato reaches this conclusion explicitly in the *Sophist*, “millions of other issues will also arise, each generating indefinitely many confusions, if you say that being is only two or one” (245d10–e1). He shows that if Being is two (many), then they both must “be”, and so “being” is the same in both, that is, one (243d6–e8). But later, he shows that if Being is one, several problems arise leading to multiplicity, such as if Being is one, then it is called both “being” and “one”, but how can it have two names if it is one? Also, is the name the same as Being? If so, then the name is either nothing, or the name of itself, and so turns out to be the name of a name and “nothing else”. Further, Being is called “whole” and “one”, but then it has parts, but that which is “truly one” cannot have parts (that which has parts is already many) (244b5–245d9). Plato’s *Parmenides* reaches the same conclusion. Whatever else we may claim about the One and Many, neither can exist by itself, without the other.²⁶ Thus, the hypotheses in the *Parmenides* ultimately show that Being can be neither One nor Many. It might be tempting to conclude that this leaves us in a state of irremediable confusion,²⁷ but there is something important here. From the hypotheses, we can see that Being cannot be a simple unity and neither can it be multiplicity without unity. The One cannot exist without the Many and the Many cannot be without the One. This entails that entities existing independently in themselves cannot be. One by itself cannot exist. But neither can two, since two are simply two independently existing unrelated entities. Unless there is a relation between the two, which as we have seen must be a third

²⁶ As I am only making what I take to be a very general observation on the relation between the One and Many as revealed in the dialogue, I do not think it is necessary here to go into a detailed discussion of other various possible readings of the *Parmenides*.

²⁷ As scholars such as Vlastos and Allen seem to do. See Vlastos, Gregory, “The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*”, *The Philosophical Review* 63, no. 3 (1954), and Allen, R. E., *Plato’s Parmenides* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

element that does not arise from either of the two entities by itself, two independently existing entities are no different than a single independently existing entity, and so just as one cannot be many, neither can two (since two independent entities are ultimately no different than one entity). So true multiplicity only arises in the relation between two things, and thus, it is ultimately the case that to exist independently is to not exist at all.²⁸

How does this follow? To exist independently requires that a thing be determinate, that is, to be a particular thing, to be other than something. But if there is no other, there can be no determination. This is essentially what both the passages from the *Sophist* and the hypotheses of the *Parmenides* show: both unity and the others are necessary. Since to be one is to be other than the many, to be one is to be determinate, and since the many, to be many, must be different from each other, the many are determinate as well. So both one and many must be determinate. But since both the one and many must exist together and cannot exist without the other, the one and many can only exist *in relation* to each other. Since we have seen that relation cannot arise from either of the relata (the one and many) but must be a third thing, the determinate existence of both one and many depends on this relation. Thus independent unrelated being, that is, substance, cannot be, and so to exist independently is to not exist. This entails that the ground of being, being as determinate being, must be pure relation, a relation independent of its relata. What follows from this is that just as true multiplicity only arises in relation, so also true unity only arises in relation. It should go without saying that the being of Relation, independent of its relata, that is, Pure Relation as the ground of Being, cannot itself be determinate. It must be indeterminate and indefinite, otherwise it contradicts itself.

To be more clear, to be determinate is to be limited, but to be limited entails otherness insofar as there must be something outside or beyond the limit. Thus, there is some otherness apart from determination which, literally, defines determination. Since to be other entails relationality, to be determinate is to be related. If relation must exist independently of the relata, that is, determinate beings, and the determinate entities are grounded in relation, then relation is ontologically prior to determinate beings. Further, since determinate being depends on relationality, the Being of relationality cannot, itself, be determinate, or else it becomes

²⁸ In preparation for the discussion to follow, it will be helpful to keep in mind the distinction between being, non-being, and beyond Being.

circular. Being must, therefore, be Pure Relation and must be ontologically prior to any determination, any relation, and so absolutely indefinite, indeterminate.²⁹

As already noted, this relational ontology is not, however, what became the dominant ontological understanding. While one can see a fundamentally ontological relationality in the earliest philosophies of Anaximander and, even more explicitly, Heraclitus,³⁰ a substance understanding begins to arise as early as Parmenides with his radically simple, determinate, and independent conception of Being.³¹ It is this substance understanding which, through Aristotle, rose to historical dominance, even as a Neoplatonic relational understanding persistently lurked in the background.

²⁹ As we will ultimately see, however, the situation is more complex. Pure Relationality must be indefinitely/indeterminately definite/indeterminate and definitely/determinately indefinite/indeterminate. It must be indeterminate/indefinite to the degree that it contains determinacy/definiteness within it. If it were simply indefinite/indeterminate, then it would be definite/determinate in being *other* than definiteness. This will be seen when we discuss the Trinity in Christian Neoplatonism later in the book.

³⁰ See Filler, James, “The Relational Ontology of Anaximander and Heraclitus”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 76, no. 2 (2022).

³¹ Parmenides is clear in his claim that Being is simple (see DK28B8.22 “Nor is it divisible, since it is all alike”); it is determinate in that unlike Anaximander’s unlimited (*ἄπειρον*), Parmenides’ Being has limits (DK28B8.42–45 “But since the limit is ultimate, it [namely, what-is] is complete from all directions, like the bulk of a well-rounded sphere, equally matched from the middle on all sides; for it is right for it to be not in any way greater or any lesser than in another,” and DK28B8.26 Being lies “motionless in the limits [*πεύρασι*] of great bonds”); and it is independent since there is nothing other than it.

PART II

Πρόοδος: Emanation



CHAPTER 2

Plato: Two Paths Diverge

The metaphysics of Heraclitus and Parmenides created a difficulty which ancient philosophers found deeply troubling. Both Heraclitus and Parmenides seem to present reasonable explanations for the world. The world we experience is certainly constantly changing and consists of a variety of different and distinct entities, so Heraclitus seems correct: Being is Many. But Parmenides' logical arguments seem unassailable as well, and if he is correct, then Being is One, and distinction is, thereby, impossible. Further, to say things are Many entails an underlying unity beyond the multiplicity of things in order for the Many to be distinctly many. This leads to the One/Many Problem. Plato particularly wrestled with this problem discussing it at length in the dialogues *Parmenides* and *Sophist*,¹ and in wrestling with this problem, Plato became a central figure, a pivot point, in the history of metaphysics. In forging something of a middle path between the ontologies of Heraclitus and Parmenides, Plato prepares the ground for both a relational ontology, which will be further developed in Neoplatonic thought, and a substantial ontology, which will come to dominate philosophy through the influence of Aristotelian thought.

Findlay explicitly notes, "Plato may very well be imagined to have occupied a middle place among all these acute-minded, logically precise

¹ See Chap. 1, section "The Problem", above for an explanation of this problem and a discussion of its implications as demonstrated in Plato's dialogues *Parmenides* and the *Sophist*.

younger men [the 'Friends of the Ideas' in the Academy], at times investing himself, with a somewhat tired tolerance, in the mantle of Parmenides, at other times verging towards the flux-doctrine of Heraclitus."² This middle place which Plato occupies is, at some level, an attempt to harmonize the Heraclitean relational ontology and the Parmenidean ontology of determinate independent existence. It must be recognized, however, that to suggest that Plato understood Heraclitus' ontology as relational would require a degree of philosophical gymnastics that stretches the evidence of the dialogues beyond recognition. Plato clearly understood Heraclitus as a philosopher of flux. Nevertheless, Plato incorporates both Heraclitean and Parmenidean elements into his explanation of the world. In the *Timaeus*, both philosophers are reflected in the cosmological principles which ground the universe. In *Timaeus* 32a7–c2, Timaeus tells Socrates,

So if the body of the universe were to have come to be as a two dimensional plane, a single middle term would have sufficed to bind together its conjoining terms with itself. As it was, however, the universe was to be a solid, and solids are never joined together by just one middle term but always by two. *Hence the god set water and air between fire and earth, and made them as proportionate to one another as was possible, so that what fire is to air, air is to water, and what air is to water, water is to earth.* He then bound them together and thus he constructed the visible and tangible universe. This is the reason why these four particular constituents were used to beget the body of the world, making it a symphony of proportion. (emphasis added)

The Heraclitean influence here is hard to miss. The four traditional elements (Earth, Air, Fire, and Water) have the same relation that we saw in Heraclitus earlier: Earth to Water, Water to Air, Air to Fire. And just as Earth and Fire lie at the ends of this process, so here the same relation is found with Water and Air being placed between Earth and Fire.³ Further, as Heraclitus states in DK22B31, there is a fixed ratio (λόγος) between the elements, which is reflected here in the *Timaeus* as well. But in the same passage, a few lines down (33a6–b6), Timaeus states,

That is why he concluded that he should fashion the world as a single whole, composed of all wholes, complete and free of old age and disease, and why he fashioned it that way. And he gave it a shape appropriate to the kind of

²Findlay, J. N., *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1974), 212–213.

³See Fragments DK22B76b and DK22B76c.

thing it was. The appropriate shape for that living thing that is to contain within itself all the living things would be the one which embraces within itself all the shapes there are. *Hence he gave it a round shape, the form of a sphere, with its center equidistant from its extremes in all directions. This of all shapes is the most complete and most like itself...* (emphasis added)

Just as Parmenides' Being is a sphere, so also in the *Timaeus*, the universe is shaped as a sphere.⁴ Even though, as shown above, Parmenides does not intend to argue that the world is a sphere, merely that Being is determinate,⁵ it is hard to read this passage and not think of Parmenides. The harmonization of these two philosophers further appears in that for Plato the sensible world of appearances mirrors the Heraclitean flux and the realm of Ideas/Forms mirrors the eternal and unchanging aspects of Parmenides' Being.⁶ However, if the influence of Heraclitus and Parmenides in Plato was limited to these levels, it would not merit mention. The ontological principle we are investigating must go deeper, and in Plato it does.

Much has been made of the doctrine of the Forms in Plato and rightly so. They are certainly central to understanding Plato's ontology, and, as just stated, they certainly reflect Parmenidean characteristics. As Plato notes in the *Phaedo*, the Forms, that is, "thing in itself, the real (αὐτὸ ἕκαστον ὃ ἔστιν, τὸ ὄν)", must be "uniform by itself, remain the same and never in any way tolerate any change whatever".⁷ They are eternal, one in themselves, and changeless, just as Parmenides' Being. One might even recognize an ontological relationality in Plato's doctrine of the Forms: the particulars are what they are by participation (μέθεξις) in the Forms.⁸ This

⁴ Parmenides' DK28B8-42-45. Sayre notes the parallel as well. See Sayre, Kenneth M., *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2005), 244.

⁵ Cf. Fränkel, Hermann, *Wegen und Formen frühgriechischen Denkens* (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1968), 193–195.

⁶ If we accept McKirahan's understanding of Parmenides in which "the attributes of what-is are taken to be the attributes that any *basic* entity must possess: it must be ungenerated and imperishable, etc. Atoms are a good example" (McKirahan, Richard, *Philosophy Before Socrates* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2010), 172–173.), then Plato's Forms fit the criteria perfectly.

⁷ In *Phaedo* 78d3–7, Socrates asks Cebes, "Can the Equal itself, the Beautiful itself, each thing in itself, the real, ever be affected by any change whatever? Or does each of them that really is, being uniform by itself, remain the same and never in any way tolerate any change whatever?"

⁸ As Aristotle notes, according to Plato, "the multitude of things which have the same name as the Form exist by participation in it." (*Metaphysics* I(A).6 987b9–10 Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1561.)

is, however, a superficial relationality that does not entail a fundamental ontological relationality; it only entails a relationality on the level of appearances, which, further, do not truly share in Being.⁹ But while the Forms may be central to Plato's ontology, the Forms are not the apex of Plato's ontology. There is an ontological principle (or principles) beyond the Forms.

Knowing that neither the Heraclitean, as he understood it, flux, in which Being is change/Many, nor the Parmenidean system, in which Being is One, can provide an adequate metaphysical ground,¹⁰ Plato seeks a First Principle of Being that lies beyond either One or Many, that is, beyond Being as experienced either in the world of appearances or in the world of intellect.¹¹ In *The Republic*, Plato asserts that The Good gives Being to "objects of knowledge (τοῖς γινωσκομένοις)" and lies "beyond Being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας)".¹² And earlier in *The Republic*, Plato established that knowledge, as opposed to opinion, has "what is (τῷ ὄντι)" as its object.¹³ Since the Forms are the realm of "what is" and are the objects of knowledge, The Good then, as "beyond Being", gives Being to The Forms. It follows then that The Good lies beyond the realm of the Forms, and since the Forms ground whatever being the realm of appearances has, it lies beyond the realm of appearances as well. Thus, it is a transcendent ontological principle. How is this transcendent First Principle that lies "beyond Being" yet gives Being to be understood?¹⁴

⁹ Findlay states, "If Plato believed or disbelieved anything, he disbelieved in the genuine being of particular things". (Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, xi.) This is also made clear in the discussion in *The Republic* 476e3ff, where Socrates and Glaucon examine the objects of knowledge (the Forms, i.e., that which "is") and opinion (appearances, i.e., that which properly neither "is" nor "is not").

¹⁰ As evidenced in Plato's discussion in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist* already noted above.

¹¹ This is the point of Plato's discussion in the *Philebus* in which the good is ultimately neither pleasure (i.e., it is not found in the world of sensation/appearance) nor knowledge (i.e., not found in the intelligible realm of the Forms).

¹² *Republic* 509b9.

¹³ *Republic* 478a6.

¹⁴ For an argument that "beyond Being" simply means "highest being" and not "transcending Being", see Baltes, Matthias, "Is the Idea of The Good in Plato's *Republic* Beyond Being?", in *Studies in Plato and the Platonic Tradition*, ed. Mark Joyal (London: Routledge, 1997). For a response see Ferber, Rafael and Damschen, Gregor, "Is the Idea of the Good Beyond Being? Plato's "epekeina tês ousias" revisited (*Republic*, 6, 509b8–10)," in *Second Sailing: Alternative Perspectives on Plato*, ed. Debra Nails and Harald Tarrant (Espoo: Wellprint Oy, 2015).

THE “UNWRITTEN” DOCTRINES

Plato says little in the dialogues directly about The Good. Socrates, in *The Republic*, claims to be unable to say what it is and only what it is like, giving rise to the three Analogies of the Good.¹⁵ But recognizing that The Good is the ontological principle underlying the Forms, it is possible to examine Plato’s understanding of the principle or principles which give rise to or constitute the Forms, and so come to an understanding of The Good. Findlay claims, as his “first and most fundamental conviction”, that “the Platonic Dialogues are not, taken by themselves, the sort of works in which anyone’s views on any matter could be clearly set forth: they point beyond themselves, and without going beyond them they are not to be understood”.¹⁶ Sayre, discussing Aristotle’s comments on Plato’s views (particularly the role of the Indefinite Dyad in Plato), says, “Generations of Plato scholars have agreed that these doctrines cannot be found in the written dialogues.”¹⁷ Both Sayre and Findlay agree that more is required than simply reading the extant dialogues in order to understand Plato’s views, and both seek an understanding of Plato which incorporates the “unwritten” doctrines found in Aristotle and others.¹⁸ In order to understand, then, the nature of The Good, the ontological ground of the

¹⁵ *Republic* 506d6–e5.

¹⁶ Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, ix.

¹⁷ Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 11.

¹⁸ Findlay states, “My book is aimed at achieving a unified presentation of a unified view of Plato, developed in relation to the full span of the Platonic writings, and the ancient writings on Plato.” (Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, xii.), and Sayre’s task is to show that the ontology presented by contemporaries and commentators of Plato, as well as by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, does indeed appear in Plato’s writings, specifically in the *Philebus*. However, while Findlay seeks to unify Plato’s thought into a coherent whole, Sayre nevertheless accepts the view that Plato ultimately rejects the earlier ontology of the “Middle” dialogues. (Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 13ff.) Guthrie notes that Aristotle, in his discussion of Plato’s ontology in *Metaphysics* I(A).6 and XIII(M).4, “makes no division, within the system of Plato himself, between an earlier and a later doctrine of Forms.” (Guthrie, W.K.C., *A History of Greek Philosophy: V The Later Plato and the Academy*, vol. 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 427.) It is my conviction that while development may occur, Plato can be read as a unified whole without the necessity of abandoning an earlier ontology in order to make sense of a later one. In my discussion here, I proceed on this assumption, as well as on the assumption that the doxographers’ statements regarding Plato’s views accurately reflect those views.

Forms, it will be necessary to examine these “unwritten” doctrines and their ontological significance.¹⁹

Regarding the Lecture on The Good, in which Plato is said to have laid out, at least to some degree, his “unwritten doctrines”, Gaiser states,

The main features of Plato’s doctrine of first principles preserved by the doxographers can be summarized as follows. The goodness (ἀρετή) of a thing is shown by its permanence, beauty, and form. These qualities depend on order (τάξις, κόσμος); that is, on a well-proportioned arrangement of parts within the whole. *The basis of order therefore is unity, and thence unity or one-ness is the cause of all good, or good in itself. Since the world is not all order and goodness, one must reckon with an opposite cause: a cause of non-unity, of indefinite plurality, and thence not-good. Everywhere these two principles can be seen acting in combination, with one or other of them dominant.*²⁰ (emphasis added)

Thus, the ultimate Platonic principles which ground reality are two: The One/Good and an “indefinite plurality” (or Indefinite Dyad). Initially, these principles seem to manifest something of a combination of Heraclitean multitude and Parmenidean unity; however, there is a much deeper reality at work here. Already there can be seen a certain relationality insofar as all things are a relation of these two principles, but this is still primarily a “πρός τι” relationality in that things are composed of a relation between the two elements of the One and Indefinite Dyad, and so it is a relation founded upon relata instead of an ontologically foundational relation. Nevertheless, while Plato himself is still governed by this “πρός τι” understanding of relation, these two principles ultimately constitute a single ontological principle that can best be seen as a pure relationality that serves as the primordial ground for all Being.

¹⁹ I place “unwritten” in quotes because, like Sayre, I believe these ideas do appear in the dialogues, even if they are “hardly even sketched out in the dialogues”, as Brandis claims. (Brandis, Christian August, *A Study of the Lost Books of Aristotle on the Ideas and on the Good or on Philosophy* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 59.)

²⁰ Gaiser, Konrad, “Plato’s Enigmatic Lecture ‘On the Good,’” *Phronesis* 25, no. 1 (1980): 12–13. And in discussing Plato’s lecture “On the Good”, Aristoxenus, citing Aristotle, says that most came to the lecture expecting to hear Plato talk about temporal goods, such as wealth or health, but were confounded when Plato concluded “that the Good was Unity (ὅτι ἀγαθὸν ἔστιν ἓν)”. (Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, 413. (Aristoxenus, *Elements of Harmony*, 40.2).)

Plato's ontology can be divided into three levels: the level of particulars (the level of appearances), the level of the Forms (the level of Being), and the level of the Good (a level "beyond Being").²¹ As just noted, Gaiser's quote above already indicates that there is a relationality on the level of "things", but what does this mean? Is it the level of particulars/appearances or the level of Forms/Being? This is an important question, because if it is only a relationality on the level of things, and not on the fundamental ontological level, then Being, in its First Principle, is still to be understood in substantial, that is, independent, terms. To answer this question, it is necessary to examine more closely what the doxographers, that is, those who reveal the "unwritten" doctrines, say regarding Plato.

In *Metaphysics* I(A).6 988a8–14, Aristotle says, "It is plain from what has been said that he [Plato] made use of only two causes, the Cause of Essential Nature and the Cause which is Material—for the Eide [Forms] cause the Essential Natures of other things, and the One causes the Eide. And as to the nature of the underlying Matter of which the Eide are predicated in the case of sensible things, but of which the One is predicated in the case of the Eide, it is plain that this is a Dyad, the Great and the Small."²² Here, Aristotle asserts that Plato made use of two ontological principles: the One, which causes the Eide/Forms, and the Eide/Forms, which cause the "essentials natures of things". However, there is another "cause" here, namely the "Dyad" or "Great and Small", and as Findlay points out, Aristotle is here noting that the Indefinite Dyad, the "underlying Matter", is as much an underlying ontological feature of the eidetic realm as it is of the sensible realm.²³ Aristotle, in *Physics* III.4 203a1–10, further says,

For all those who are thought to have made worthwhile contributions to Physics, have discoursed about the Infinite and all have made it a Principle of things, some, like the Pythagoreans and Plato, as something self-existent and a substantial reality, and not as an accident of anything else. But the Pythagoreans put the Infinite among sensible things (for to them Number

²¹ Krämer lists four levels of reality: (1) sensible object, (2) mathematical natures, (3) universals, (4) the principles. (Krämer, Hans Joachim, *Plato and the Foundation of Metaphysics*, trans. John R. Catan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 83.) For our purposes, levels 2 and 3 can be combined.

²² Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of the doxographers, including Aristotle, are taken from Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*.

²³ *Ibid.*, 416.

did not exist apart), and said that what lay outside the Heavens was infinite, whereas Plato denied that there was any body outside of the Heavens, not even the Ideas, which were nowhere, but held, none the less, that there was an Infinite both in sensible things and in the Ideas.

Simplicius, in his commentary on the Aristotle passage above, clarifies,

Plato denies that the Ideas are beyond the Heavens, since they are not located in space at all, but he asserts none the less that there is an Infinite Element both in sensible things and in the Ideas. Aristotle says that Plato made the One and the Indefinite Dyad the Principles of sensible things in his discourses on the Good, but he also located the Indefinite Dyad in the noetic realm, and made the Great and Small into Principles there, saying they were a case of the Infinite.²⁴

For Plato then, the Infinite and Indefinite Dyad are identified and function as “matter” in both the eidetic and sensible realms. Thus, we see: (1) the Indefinite Dyad, Great and Small, and Infinite are all synonymous terms for Plato, and (2) the first two levels of reality, that is, sensibles and Forms, consist of both the One and Indefinite Dyad; in other words, they are relational in their Being.²⁵

If Horky is correct in his claim that Aristotle, based on the comments in *Metaphysics* I.5–I.6, 987a13–b18,²⁶ “assumes that Plato’s metaphysics

²⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, 418. (Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*, Vol. 9, p. 453, lines 19–28.)

²⁵ One might here argue that there is a difference between being composed of things and being constituted by a relation of those things. I’m not certain what this difference would be unless being constituted by a relation of things presupposes a certain ordering of the things which constitute an entity’s being, and being composed of things simply indicates that things are a part of some entity. However, what constitutes both the sensibles and the Forms is a certain relation between the One and the Indefinite Dyad, so that the argument would not apply here regardless.

²⁶ “But the Pythagoreans have said in the same way that there are two principles, but added this much, which is peculiar to them, that they thought finitude and infinity [the limited and the unlimited—Horky, Phillip Sidney, *Plato and Pythagoreanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 183. And also Graham, Daniel W., *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 509.] were not attributes of certain other things, e.g., of fire or earth or anything else of this kind, but that infinity itself and unity itself were the substance of the things of which they are predicated. This is why number was the substance of all things. On this subject, then, they expressed themselves thus; and regarding the question of essence they began to make statements and definitions, but treated the mat-

operates by virtue of the same ontological vehicle as the Pythagoreans”,²⁷ then some understanding of that vehicle would be helpful. In the passage just cited, Aristotle states, “But the Pythagoreans have said in the same way that there are two principles, but added this much, which is peculiar to them, that they thought finitude [Limit] and infinity [Unlimited]²⁸ were not attributes of certain other things, ... but that infinity itself and unity itself were the substance of the things of which they are predicated” (*Metaphysics* I.5, 987a14–20). So Aristotle attributes two principles to the Pythagoreans: Limit and Unlimited. But then how are Limit and Unlimited related to the One/Good and Indefinite Dyad?

Limit and Unlimited are well-documented as principles in Pythagorean thought,²⁹ and, as just seen, Aristotle himself asserts that the Limited and Unlimited are fundamental ontological principles, identifying Limit with

ter too simply. For they both defined superficially and thought that the first subject of which a given term would be predicable, was the substance of the thing, as if one supposed that double and two were the same, because two is the first thing of which double is predicable. But surely to be double and to be two are not the same; if they are, one thing will be many—a consequence which they actually drew. From the earlier philosophers, then, and from their successors we can learn this much.

After the systems we have named came the philosophy of Plato, which in most respects followed these thinkers, but had peculiarities that distinguished it from the philosophy of the Italians. For, having in his youth first become familiar with Cratylus and with the Heraclitean doctrines (that all sensible things are ever in a state of flux and there is no knowledge about them), these views he held even in later years. Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical matters, and fixed thought for the first time on definitions; Plato accepted his teaching, but held that the problem applied not to any sensible thing but to entities of another kind—for this reason, that the common definition could not be a definition of any sensible thing, as they were always changing. Things of this other sort, then, he called Ideas, and sensible things, he said, were apart from these, and were all called after these; for the multitude of things which have the same name as the Form exist by participation in it. Only the name ‘participation’ was new; for the Pythagoreans say that things exist by imitation of numbers, and Plato says they exist by participation, changing the name. But what the participation or the imitation of the Forms could be they left an open question.

Further, besides sensible things and Forms he says there are the objects of mathematics, which occupy an intermediate position, differing from sensible things in being eternal and unchangeable, from Forms in that there are many alike, while the Form itself is in each case unique.” (English translation taken from Barnes (*Aristotle, The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1561).)

²⁷ Horky, *Plato and Pythagoreanism*, 185.

²⁸ “τὸ πεπερασμένον καὶ τὸ ἄπειρον”, translated as “limited” and “unlimited” respectively in both Horky and Graham. See n. 57.

²⁹ See Kirk, Raven, and Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 324ff.

the One, Unity.³⁰ However, this identity of One with Limit is not as clear as it seems. A few lines earlier, Aristotle also says,

These thinkers [Pythagoreans] also consider that number is the principle both as matter for things and as forming their modifications and states, and hold that the elements of number are the even and the odd, and of these the former is unlimited, and the latter limited; and the one proceeds from both of these (for it is both even and odd), and number from the one; and the whole heaven, as has been said, is numbers. (*Metaphysics* I.5 986a16–21)³¹

Here, the principles are Even and Odd, which are Unlimited and Limit, respectively, and from Limit and Unlimited together, the One arises. McKirahan diagrams the distinction as follows: (1) according to the latter account—even/odd (Unlimited/Limit) → the one → number → the universe, (2) according to the former account—unlimited and limited (= the one) → number → all things.³² The question to be examined here is: How does Limit, Unlimited, One, and Indefinite Dyad function in the ontology of Plato? If, as Horky asserts, Plato operates according to the same “ontological vehicle” as the Pythagoreans, then we should, at the very least, expect there to be an identification of the Pythagorean Limit and Unlimited with the Platonic One and Indefinite Dyad, but what would this identification be?³³ Since for Plato the One is contrasted with the Dyad, and the Dyad is identified with the Unlimited/Infinite, the One, for Plato, must be identified with Limit—the fact that Aristotle’s testimony is ambiguous about whether the Pythagoreans identified the One with Limit or saw the One as deriving from the harmony of Limit and the Unlimited is inconsequential. What is important, in recognizing the connection between Plato and the Pythagoreans, is that both see Limit and Unlimited as First Principles, and Plato identifies One with Limit and the Indefinite Dyad with the Unlimited/Infinite. It remains to be seen how these principles manifest in the dialogues.

³⁰ McKirahan notes this as well (McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, 102.).

³¹ English according to Barnes (Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1559.)

³² McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, 101–102.

³³ I will take no position on the relation of the One and Limit in Pythagorean thought, given that it is unclear whether the One is the same as Limit or derives from the principles of Limit and Unlimited together.

THE SOPHIST

In the *Sophist*, Plato offers an account in which Being and Difference align with Limit and the Unlimited.³⁴ In this dialogue, Plato distinguishes Five “most important Kinds”: Being, Difference, Sameness, Motion, and Rest.³⁵ Of these “Five Kinds”, “that *that which is* [Being] and *the different* pervade all of them and each other.”³⁶ Being and Difference then take on an ontological priority among the Five Kinds.³⁷ But how do Being and Difference pervade all things, and how do they function in their

³⁴ In what follows, I am taking no position on the methodological issues involved, for example, the methodology of collection and division, and their implications for either knowledge or the role of the First Principles. All I seek to do here is offer a basic discussion of the First Principles in Plato and their ontological roles. A more detailed discussion of this aspect of Plato’s thought can be found in Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 218–238. And also in Ionescu, Cristina, “Dialectic in Plato’s Sophist: Division and the Communion of Kinds,” *Arethusa* 46, no. 1 (2013).

³⁵ *Sophist* 254d4–255a2.

³⁶ *Sophist* 259a5–6. It might also be argued that Sameness pervades all and each other as well. Sayre (Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 224.), Cornford (Cornford, F. M., *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1935), 61.), and Ionescu (Ionescu, “Dialectic in Plato’s Sophist: Division and the Communion of Kinds,” 56.), for example, claim this. If, as we will see when we examine the *Timaeus*, the Same ultimately is Limit and Being is ultimately the One, then this must be the case, since Being (as the One) and the Same (as Limit) must be united, since the One and Limit, if our understanding is correct, are identified. This is especially so if, as we will see, the One/Being limits. The question arises in the *Sophist* why does Plato examine the issue in such an obscure manner? A couple of possibilities exist. First, it may be that while Plato is discussing the nature of the One and Dyad, this is not the primary question being examined in the text. So it may reflect Plato’s ontological understanding, but he is not concerned to express it in a precise manner. Thus, Plato is not being precise in his ontological explanation simply because it is not his primary concern here. Another possibility is that Plato had misgivings about putting his teachings in written form. As an example of this approach, Sayre cites the Tübingen school, relying on statements Plato made in the *Phaedrus* and the Seventh Letter. (Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, xii.) It is my belief that the former possibility is the correct one. It seems clear that Plato is pursuing primarily an understanding of how something can “not be”, although this doesn’t completely exclude the latter understanding, that is, that Plato is “hiding” his teachings, as a possibility as well.

³⁷ Why, then, five important Kinds and not two? It seems clear, since the discussion has been about the blending of Forms, that these Five Kinds blend with all other Forms, although only these two blend with all Five Kinds as well. “We’ve agreed on this: some kinds will associate with each other and some won’t, some will to a small extent and others will associate a great deal, nothing prevents still others from being all-pervading—from being associated with every one of them. So next let’s pursue our account together this way. Let’s not talk about every form. That way we won’t be thrown off by dealing with too many of them. Instead let’s choose some of the most important ones. First we’ll ask what they’re like, and next we’ll ask about their ability to associate with each other.” *Sophist* 254b7–c5.

pervasiveness? We can see that Being pervades all the Forms in that each of them *is*. Plato gives us the model in the discussion about Motion and Rest, “*that which is* [Being] blends with both of them [Motion and Rest], since presumably both of them are”.³⁸ This makes it clear that Being pervades all Forms since the Forms *are*, but Difference must pervade them all as well, otherwise Motion and Rest would be the same, which is clearly impossible.³⁹ So Being pervades all Forms by making them be, and Difference pervades all Forms insofar as they are different from each other. They both pervade each other in that Being both *is* and is different from the other Forms,⁴⁰ while at the same time Difference both *is* and is different from the other Forms.⁴¹

It is tempting here to say that Difference limits things and Being is a kind of substratum that Difference cuts up into distinct elements. But this is not the way Plato describes it. It is Being/Unity which limits, because it makes things one, that is, a unit. Difference is the substratum that Being limits. Plato states,

Visitor: The nature of the different appears to be chopped up, just like knowledge.

Theaetetus: Why?

Visitor: Knowledge is a single thing, too, I suppose. But each part of it that has to do with something is marked off and has a name peculiar to itself. That’s why there are said to be many expertises and many kinds of knowledge.

Theaetetus: Of course.

Visitor: And so the same thing happens to the parts of the nature of the different, too, even though it’s one thing.

Theaetetus: Maybe. But shall we say how?

Visitor: Is there a part of the different that’s placed over against the beautiful?

Theaetetus: Yes.

Visitor: Shall we say that it’s nameless, or does it have a name?

³⁸ *Sophist* 254d10.

³⁹ Cf. *Sophist* 252d6–10.

⁴⁰ Plato states this at 257a1–2 when he states, “So we have to say that *that which is* itself is different from the others [Forms].”

⁴¹ For the argument why Being and Difference are not one and the same, see 255c8–d7.

Theaetetus: It has a name. What we call *not beautiful* is the thing that's different from nothing other than the nature of the beautiful.

Visitor: Now go ahead and tell me this.

Theaetetus: What?

Visitor: Isn't it in the following way that *the not beautiful* turns out to be, namely, by being both marked off within one kind of *those that are*, and also set over against one of *those that are*?

Theaetetus: Yes.

Visitor: Then it seems that *the not beautiful* is a sort of setting of a being over against a being.⁴²

Thus, this “setting of a being over against a being” (ἀντιτίθημι) is how Difference gets “cut up” (κατακερματίζω), and so it is not Difference that makes things distinct, but rather Being, placed against Difference, that makes things distinct. In other words, Difference is an indefinite Form which, when blended with Being, becomes distinct. Plato notes the indefiniteness of Difference in 256e8, “So as concerning each of the forms that which is [Being] is extensive, and that which is not [Difference] is indefinite in quantity.” But it is not only the characterization of Difference as indefinite that makes this passage important; its characterization of Being as “extensive” offers insight as well. The word translated “extensive” is the word “πολὺ”, which in the plural is more commonly translated “many”. How is this to be understood? How is Being “many”? It is important to recognize that it is singular here, so “many” is not an adequate translation. The proper English word would be “much”. So literally, the phrase would be “that which is [Being] is much”. While “extensive”, although loose, seems adequate here, its spatial connotations are unfortunate. It is not “extensive” spatially but extensive in the sense of “full” or “abundant” or perhaps even “whole”. If this passage is understood in this light, then it can clearly be seen that Being is a “wholeness” that “chops up” Difference into distinct Forms that are different from each other but one insofar as they all *are*. Alexander in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* 987b33, regarding the relation of the One and the Indefinite Dyad for Plato, states, “When given definition by the One, the Indefinite Dyad became the Numerical Dyad.”⁴³ Krämer notes this, although he

⁴² *Sophist* 257c7–e7.

⁴³ As translated in Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, 417. (Alexander, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, pp. 56, 20–22).

recognizes broader implications, as well, when he states “unity itself ... limits and determines the unlimited material substrate in a complete way”.⁴⁴ And Sayre, clarifying four ontological theses attributed to Plato by Aristotle in *Metaphysics*, states the third thesis as, “the Forms are composed of the Great and (the) Small [Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited] and Unity”.⁴⁵ It is clear, then, that Being, the One, Limit, gives definition and determination to Difference, the Indefinite, Unlimited, and in so doing gives rise to distinct Forms.⁴⁶ So all Forms are relational in their ontological ground. The inter-pervasiveness of the Forms, the Five Great Kinds, and particularly Being and Difference, however, entails something more. The inter-pervasiveness and co-constitutionality of the Forms entail a relationality of the whole system. As Krämer further notes in the same passage just cited, it is not just individual Forms that are the product of the One limiting the Indefinite; rather, it is the “order of the whole”.⁴⁷ The system of Forms are relational with each other, and the First Principles (Being/One/Limit and Difference/Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited) are also relational. Relationality pervades the entire system for Plato.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Krämer, *Plato and the Foundation of Metaphysics*, 166. We have already noted the role of the Indefinite Dyad as Matter in the quote from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*I(A).6 988a8–14 above.

⁴⁵ Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 116.

⁴⁶ That Alexander says these first Forms are numbers and so emphasizes numerical Twoness is not our concern here. And so how the Five Great Kinds relate to numbers is beyond our scope. What is important here is the role and relation of Being/One/Limit and Difference/Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad.

⁴⁷ Krämer, *Plato and the Foundation of Metaphysics*, 166.

⁴⁸ Given that Plato says in *The Republic* that the Good is “beyond Being” (509b9), one might ask if we are accurate in identifying Being with the One/Limit, since these would belong to the First Principle, and for Plato the First Principle is clearly “the Good”. Here, we have Being as one of the Forms. Since the Good must be beyond Being and so Beyond the Forms, how are we to understand this? There are several possibilities here. First, it is possible that Being and Difference in the *Sophist* do not represent the Good/One/Limit and Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited themselves, but rather represent the first Formal “emanation” (to use a Neoplatonic term) of them. In this light, Being and Difference would be first or supreme among the Forms, being the first manifestation of Limit and Unlimited in the realm of the Forms and thus would function as Limit and Unlimited in this realm. A second possibility is that they are the First Principle, together constituting the Good, and Plato calls the One/Limit by the name Being (or literally “that which is”—τὸ ὄν) because it is the source of Being. This second interpretation would be supported by the context of the dialogue, since what is being examined is the notion of falsehood and how non-being is to be understood. (See *Sophist* 258a11ff.) I make no judgment about the correct interpretation here. I think both are plausible, and further, I do not think they are mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the resolution of this question is unnecessary for my project.

Heidegger, too, recognizes the essential relationality in the *Sophist*.

It is remarkable, and is precisely one of the clear witnesses to the inner limitation of Greek ontology, that here in the analysis of the ἕτερον [other] Plato encounters the phenomenon of the πρὸς [toward], the phenomenon of the relation-to, but is not capable, precisely in view of his own dialectic and his dialectical task, of making visible this πρὸς τι [toward something] as a universal structure, insofar as this πρὸς τι is also an apriori structural moment of the καθ' αὐτό [according to itself]. Even sameness, the “in-itself,” includes the moment of the πρὸς τι; it is just that here the relation-to points back to itself.⁴⁹

Heidegger asserts the inherent relationality of Difference, recognizing its essential nature as directed toward an other, which Plato also explicitly recognizes, “*the different* is always said in relation to another, isn’t it?”⁵⁰ However, Heidegger here recognizes that relationality goes deeper and is ontologically fundamental in itself for all things. It is an “apriori” ontological moment in all things, even the thing “in-itself” (καθ' αὐτό). But, as Heidegger also recognizes, Plato is unable to recognize this essential and ontologically primordial relationality. It is not, however, simply Plato’s method and purpose that prevent him from recognizing the fundamental ontological primordially of relation; it is also the language itself. The term used almost exclusively by the ancient Greeks for relation, πρὸς τι, means “towards some thing”, and so already the language presupposes relation as founded upon relata.⁵¹ Thus, while Heidegger recognizes in his own metaphysic, the ontological priority of relation, even to the extent that

⁴⁹ Heidegger, Martin, *Plato’s Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 377.

⁵⁰ *Sophist* 255d1.

⁵¹ Later, the word “σχέσις” will also be used to mean “relation”, but primarily, it means “state”, “condition”. Etymologically, it derives from the word “ἔχω”, which means “to have, possess, hold”. (See Liddell, Henry George and Scott, Robert, ed. *A Greek English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1744, 749.) The idea of a “state” or “condition” is much more conducive to relation understood as ontologically prior to relata. σχέσις is also the word used by many of the Church Fathers to describe the relationships within the Trinity (cf. Lampe, G. W. H., ed. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 1357.)

relation ontologically grounds things as things in themselves, that is, as determinate things, Plato is not yet able to.⁵²

THE PHILEBUS

While Limit and the Unlimited are present in the *Sophist*, they are more clearly reflected in the *Philebus*. Early in the dialogue, Plato has Socrates say, “Whatever is said to be consists of one and many, having in its nature limit and unlimitedness.”⁵³ Later, after reaffirming that “what is” is divided into “the unlimited and the limit”, Plato asserts two more “kinds”. In addition to the two kinds, Limit and Unlimited, there is “the mixture of these two” as well as “a fourth kind” which Plato defines as “the cause of this combination of those two [Limit and Unlimited] together”.⁵⁴ This delineates three principles: Limit, Unlimited, and that which combines the two.⁵⁵ Following this discussion, Plato explains the nature of the Limited and Unlimited. The Unlimited is indefinite and characterized by “more and less”.

SOCRATES: We are agreed, then, that the hotter and the colder always contain the more and less.

PROTARCHUS: Quite definitely.

SOCRATES: Our argument forces us to conclude that these things never have an end. And since they are endless, they turn out to be entirely unlimited.⁵⁶

⁵²We will examine Heidegger’s understanding of the ontological priority of relationality when we examine Heidegger.

⁵³*Philebus* 16c9–10.

⁵⁴23c9–d8.

⁵⁵Dancy sees “unlimited” in a different light. In recognizing two discussions, one following the “Heavenly tradition”, that is, the discussion of the method as a “gift of the gods”, and the other following the “Fourfold Division”, in which Unlimited and Limit are two of four “kinds”, he asserts that according to the first discussion, Unlimited refers to infinitely many particulars, and according to the second, it refers to “aspects or features of things that admit more and less, and so are not limited”. (Dancy, R. M., “The Limits of Being in the “Philebus”,” *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science* 40, no. 1 (2007): 56.) This understanding fails to recognize the connection of the Unlimited to the Indefinite Dyad of Aristotle and the doxographers and also fails to consider the fundamental metaphysical role the Unlimited plays.

⁵⁶24b4–8.

Further, “Wherever they [‘more and less’] apply, they prevent everything from adopting a definite quantity.”⁵⁷ Thus opposites, such as “hotter and colder”, while participating of “more and less”, lack definiteness. So it is Limit that “takes away their excesses and unlimitedness, and establishes moderation and harmony in that domain”.⁵⁸ So only when Limit is imposed does opposition resolve into the “harmony” of definiteness. A couple of things can be seen here. First, by identifying the Unlimited and “more and less” with each other, the Indefinite Dyad (which both Aristotle and Simplicius identified with the Great and the Small) also appears as a principle.⁵⁹ Second, as was seen in the *Sophist*, Limit and Unlimited combine to give rise to all things, to “everything that actually exists now in the universe”.⁶⁰ Sayre explains the role of Limit and Unlimited in the *Philebus* as follows:

In the *Philebus* the Forms are ontologically derivative. Like sensible objects, Forms now are constituted from more basic principles. The main difference between Forms and sensible objects with respect to their constitution is that the composition of the former is prior to that of the latter. For whereas sensible objects are composed of Forms and the Unlimited, Forms themselves are composed from the same Unlimited in combination with the principle of Limit.⁶¹

This is the same role that we saw working at the level of the Forms in the *Sophist*. What is added is the role Limit and Unlimited play in the constitution of particulars.

But the concern here is the nature of the First Principle, the underlying ground of Being itself. Given what Plato says here, it must be asked, What is the nature of this “cause” which combines Limit and the Unlimited? Is the “cause” itself the principles Limit and the Unlimited or is it a third principle along with Limit and the Unlimited? If it has been correct to identify Limit with One/The Good, and Unlimited with the Indefinite Dyad/Great-Small, then there seems to be some other principle at work in addition to Plato’s The Good and the Indefinite Dyad. It thus becomes critical to understand the nature of this “Cause”. In 27b1, Plato has

⁵⁷ 24c3.

⁵⁸ 26a7–8.

⁵⁹ It should require little argumentation to recognize Great and Small in More and Less.

⁶⁰ 23c4.

⁶¹ Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 14–15.

Socrates say, “We therefore declare that the craftsman [δημιουργοῦν] who produces all these [Limit, Unlimited, and the Mixture] must be the fourth kind, the cause.”⁶² A couple of interesting points arise here. The first is that the Cause is called “δημιουργοῦν” or “Demiurge”. This is the title given to the Creator in the *Timaeus*, as will be seen, so there is a clear connection between the Cause in the *Philebus* and the Demiurge in the *Timaeus*. The second is an ambiguity. What is the scope of “all these” [πάντα ταῦτα]? Does the Cause produce all three kinds, in which case it produces Limit and the Unlimited too, or does it only produce the third kind, the mixture of Limit and the Unlimited? Plato does not seem to intend that the Cause is cause of Limit and Unlimited but rather of the third kind, that is, the mixture. He states this both in 23c9–d8, cited above, and when he recounts the distinction in 27b7–c1, “As the first I count the unlimited, limit as the second, afterwards in third place comes the being which is mixed and generated out of those two. And no mistake is made if *the cause of this mixture and generation* is counted as number four?” (emphasis added). Thus, it seems that there are three principles: Limit, Unlimited, and the Demiurge/Cause.

However, is this so? Socrates in the dialogue certainly asserts it to be the case, when he distinguishes the Cause as a fourth kind distinct from Limit and the Unlimited. The overarching question of the dialogue, however, is whether the life of pleasure or the life of knowledge is the “good” life. Here, the dialogue returns to the question on the basis of the distinctions just made and attempts to assign each life to one of the four kinds. In 20d1ff, it was resolved that neither pleasure nor knowledge of itself is the good. Now, in investigating to which of the kinds each belongs, pleasure itself is designated to belong to the Unlimited, and since pleasure itself cannot be the good, Socrates concludes, “we have to search for something besides its unlimited character that would bestow on pleasures a share of the good.”⁶³ Thus, the Unlimited cannot be the cause of the good. But this seems to imply that Limit is.

But this requires deeper explanation. The two lives they were examining are pleasure, which is of the nature of the Unlimited, and knowledge. To which of the kinds does knowledge belong? It is also worth noting that these two “realms”, that is, pleasure and knowledge, correspond to the ontological structure of Plato’s world. Pleasure corresponds to the world

⁶² 27b1–2.

⁶³ 28a1–3.

of particulars, the world of sensation and sensibles: to the changing. It belongs to the nature of the body. It is in this regard that Plato asserts that pleasures are “of the sort that admit the more and less [τὸ μᾶλλον τε καὶ ἧττον]”,⁶⁴ and so belongs to the Unlimited. Knowledge, on the other hand, does not belong to the body but to the mind. It corresponds to the realm of the Forms. It is the Forms that are knowable for Plato, as was shown above. But do the Forms belong to Limit, as pleasure belongs to the Unlimited? Plato here notes, “As to assigning intelligence, knowledge, and reason to one of our aforesaid kinds, how can we avoid the danger of blasphemy, Protarchus and Philebus? A lot seems to hinge on whether or not we give the right answer to this question.”⁶⁵ And after further discussion as to which kind knowledge belongs, they conclude, “Reason belongs to that kind which is the cause of everything.”⁶⁶ So while pleasure belongs to the Unlimited, knowledge belongs to the fourth kind, the Cause, the Demiurge.

Three ontological principles have been noted: The Unlimited, Limit, and The Cause/Demiurge. The Unlimited is characterized by More and Less, or as Aristotle notes the Great and Small, the Indefinite Dyad. Limit is more complex and its character is revealed, as Plato asserts, in the examination of the character of the Mixture, the fourth Kind.⁶⁷ In describing the nature of Limit, Plato has Socrates say, it is “[t]he kind that contains equal and double, and whatever else puts an end to the conflicts there are among opposites, making them commensurate [σύμμετρα] and harmonious [σύμφωνα] by imposing a definite number on them”.⁶⁸ And earlier, “the equal’ and ‘equality’ and, after the equal, things like ‘double’, and all that is related as number to number or measure to measure: If we subsume all these together under the heading of ‘limit’, we would seem to do a fair

⁶⁴ 27e5–6.

⁶⁵ 28a4–7.

⁶⁶ 30d10–e1.

⁶⁷ 25d2–d9. “Socrates: Yes. Now take the next step and mix with it [the class of the Unlimited] the class of the limit.

Protarchus: Which one?

Socrates: The very one we have so far omitted to collect together, the class that has the character of limit, although we ought to have given unity to it, just as we collected together the unlimited kind. But *perhaps it will come to the same thing even now if, through the collection [συνηγάγομεν—‘bring together’, i.e., ‘mixture’] of these two kinds, the unity of the former kind becomes conspicuous too*” (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ 25d11–e2.

job.”⁶⁹ Thus, Limit is essentially characterized by measure, harmony, proportion.⁷⁰ And finally, the Demiurge corresponds to Mind. It is also the function of the Demiurge/Reason to order the universe: “There is, above them [Limit and the Unlimited], a certain cause, of no small significance, that orders and coordinates the years, seasons, and months, and which has every right to the title of wisdom and reason.”⁷¹ Since to be ordered is to be measured and harmonious, this passage would seem to indicate that the Demiurge/Reason orders the universe by imposing Limit upon the Unlimited, and the Limit is something distinct from the Demiurge. But if it is Limit which makes things measured and harmonious, and so imposes order, how is it that Reason, the Demiurge, orders the universe? Without Reason, without the Demiurge there could be no order, so how is it that Reason/the Demiurge is separate from Limit? What could Limit be apart from the Demiurge? If it is Limit that imposes measure and harmony, and so order, then how does Reason rule? According to Plato, without Reason everything is disordered. When Plato has Socrates raise the question, “Whether we hold the view that the universe and this whole world order are ruled by unreason and irregularity, as chance would have it, or whether they are not rather, as our forebears taught us, governed by reason and by the order of a wonderful intelligence,”⁷² the former is declared by Protarchus to be clearly absurd and impious, and so the latter must clearly be the case. Thus, Reason, the Demiurge, rules and orders the universe. So if Limit, as that which establishes measure and order, is not something within the Demiurge, or an aspect of the Demiurge, then what apart from the Demiurge could it be? Could it be simply that Limit establishes order by being imposed by the Demiurge?

Just as the Unlimited is characterized by More and Less, so also Limit is characterized by measure, proportion, harmony. This seems to entail that Limit does not merely establish order but is *itself* order. So how is this related to the Demiurge/Reason/the Cause? While Plato seems to assert that Limit and the Cause/Demiurge are separate, a more complex relationship is reached by the end of the dialogue. In 65a, Plato identifies the Good with three aspects which are to be taken together as a unity: beauty,

⁶⁹ 25a7–b2.

⁷⁰ We will see later (cf. 65a–b) that measure and proportion are synonymous. Additionally, *σύμμετρα* can mean “proportionate” as well as “commensurate” (see Liddell, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 1679).

⁷¹ 30c4–7.

⁷² 28d5–9.

proportion/measure, and truth.⁷³ Plato further examines each of these three, that is, truth, beauty, and proportion/measure, in relation to reason and in each case, reason is shown to be identical or nearly identical to each. Regarding truth, they conclude, “Reason ... either is the same as truth or of all things it is most like it and most true”;⁷⁴ regarding measure, “nothing more measured than reason and knowledge could ever be found”;⁷⁵ and finally, regarding beauty, “no one, awake or dreaming, could ever see intelligence and reason to be ugly; no one could ever have conceived of them as becoming or being ugly, or that they ever will be,”⁷⁶ implying that reason can only ever be beautiful. So it seems that Reason and Limit are identical. However, a few lines later, the three unified aspects of the Good are broken up with Measure being of the first rank, the “well-proportioned” and beautiful receiving second rank, and reason receiving the third rank.⁷⁷ How is this to be understood? Not only are reason, measure, beauty, and proportion separated, but measure and proportion which seemed

⁷³ 65a1–3 “if we cannot capture the good in *one* form, we will have to take hold of it in a conjunction of three: beauty, proportion, and truth. Let us affirm that these should by right be treated as a unity” (emphasis in the translation). This identification of the Good with Limit/Measure should not be surprising given what we saw above. Sayre also notes that this identification of the Good with beauty and truth brings back into the *Philebus* aspects of the Good found in earlier dialogues, namely, the *Symposium* and *Republic* respectively. He states: “At the end of the Book VI of the *Republic*, where the Good so extravagantly is likened to the sun as sovereign over the intelligible and the visible worlds, respectively, the relationship between the intelligible and the visible is represented by a line ‘divided with regard to truth and falsehood’ (διηρησθαι ἀληθείᾳ τε καὶ μὴ 510A9–10). The clarity with which its various sections can be presented to the mind is a function of the truth of their respective objects (511E3–5). In the speech of Diotima in the *Symposium*, on the other hand, there are strong intimations that the Good is the Beautiful. What all lovers of the Good long for is to make the Good their own forever (206A). And in describing the pursuit of this longing, Diotima divides into several stages (suggestive of stages of the Divided Line) man’s successive approach to the Beautiful itself (211C9).” (Sayre, *Plato’s Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 172–173.). And he concludes, “Perhaps with these earlier contexts in mind, Plato has Socrates deny at *Philebus* 65A that the Good can be identified as a single character. Rather, the Good in some sense is a synthetic unity, incorporating not only truth (from the *Republic*) and beauty (from the *Symposium*) but also proportion (which has been central in the discussion of the *Philebus*)” (ibid., 173).

⁷⁴ 65d2–3.

⁷⁵ 65d9–10.

⁷⁶ 65e4–7.

⁷⁷ 66a6–b6.

synonymous earlier are themselves separated.⁷⁸ And again, in 22d, Plato has Socrates suggest that Reason is the cause of the Good,⁷⁹ something that fits more with the assertion that the Demiurge/Reason is the cause of the mixture of Limit and the Unlimited, and so Reason is itself separate from and higher than Limit/The Good.

There are two questions to be addressed here. The first is how it is to be understood that measure/proportion, beauty, and truth together constitute the Good while also distinguishing in ranks, measure, proportion, beauty, and truth? The second question is how Reason is the Cause of the Good, yet is identified with the three aspects of the Good, and yet again is of the third rank? Regarding the first question, Sayre understands the three aspects, that is, beauty, measure/proportion, and truth, to constitute the Good as a “synthetic unity”, but goes on to assert that “When the final results are announced to the world at 66A-B, however, measure has been singled out for highest honors, with proportion and beauty taking second place. And truth seems to have slipped to third, insofar as truth is the object of intelligence and wisdom.”⁸⁰ He thus concludes that “the Good which is the highest of all possessions falls within the domain of measure and the mean”, and a few lines later, “measure is the primary ingredient of the Good.”⁸¹ Thus, by his understanding, it seems that measure, proportion, truth, and beauty together as a unity constitute the Good, but, nevertheless, certain of these are more responsible for the “goodness” of the Good than others, namely and in order: measure, proportion and beauty, and truth/reason. On the surface, this seems to make sense, but if these three aspects are what give “goodness” to the Good, then it seems that measure *qua* measure, beauty *qua* beauty, etc., must themselves, in some sense, be over the Good, since they give the Good its goodness, that is, they make the Good good. Sayre might claim that it is not the case that beauty, measure, and truth make the Good good, but rather measure, beauty, and truth are aspects of the Good in which the Good is more present in measure than beauty, and more present in beauty

⁷⁸ In 65a2, Socrates says it is “beauty, proportion, and truth” (κάλλει καὶ συμμετρίας καὶ ἀληθείᾳ) which are unified in the Good. But in 65b8, the same list substitutes “measure” for “proportion”, when Protarchus says, “You mean to beauty, truth, and measure? (Κάλλους καὶ ἀληθείας καὶ μετρίότητος περί λεγεις;)” To which Socrates answers, “Yes.”

⁷⁹ 22d3–4 “neither of the two [pleasure or reason] would be the good, but it could be assumed that one or the other of them is its *cause*” (emphasis in the translation).

⁸⁰ Sayre, *Plato's Late Ontology: A Riddle Resolved*, 173.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

than in truth. This seems to be the implication of his assertion that measure is the *primary* ingredient of the Good:

But we know from 25A-B that measure is achieved by the imposition of Limit. And as argued earlier in this chapter, Limit and Unity are ontologically equivalent. So the following deduction is now available. Whereas measure is the primary ingredient of the Good, and whereas measure is achieved by the imposition of Limit, which in this role is equivalent to participation in Unity, for something to be good is for it to participate in Unity. For Plato in the *Philebus*, the Good is Unity. As Socrates puts it at 65A3-5, it is because of Unity that a mixture becomes good.⁸²

Thus, by being the primary ingredient of the Good, measure partakes of more unity and so more goodness. By their rankings then, beauty would partake of less unity/goodness than measure but more than truth. Even if Sayre avoids the problem that measure, beauty, etc., make the Good good with this claim, nevertheless, there remains another problem. If measure is the result of the imposition of Limit, and Limit and Unity are ontologically equivalent, how can measure be the primary ingredient of the Good, that is, what makes it a Unity? How can measure be the primary ingredient of Unity if it is Unity/Limit that generates measure? By making measure the primary *ingredient* of the Good, it seems inescapable that he is making measure the primary criterion of the Good, and so, even if measure does not *make* the Good good, nevertheless it causes, in some sense, the goodness of the Good. One might argue that it does not cause the goodness of the Good but only the goodness of other things which are good. This seems to be Sayre's position when he says that it is "because of Unity that a mixture becomes good". However, by asserting that measure is the *primary* ingredient of the Good, this entails that there are other ingredients of the Good. In fact, the Good itself must be a mixture of measure, proportion, beauty, and truth, as 65a1-5 makes clear. So Sayre's position must entail that it is measure that makes the Good good as well. Problems persist.

Further, if the Good is One/Unity, as Sayre rightly asserts, then measure, proportion, beauty, and truth cannot be parts or even ingredients of the Good. This would make the Good a mixture, a multiplicity, and not One, not a Unity. Thus, measure, proportion, beauty, and truth must be

⁸² Ibid.

synonymous. And as seen above, they, in fact, are. Plato says this explicitly, “these [beauty, measure/proportion, and truth] *should by right be treated as a unity* and be held responsible for what is in the mixture, for its goodness is what makes the mixture itself a good one”⁸³ (emphasis added). So the three, that is, measure/proportion, beauty, and truth, are not distinct properties or ingredients but must be a single unity; literally they are one (ἓν). Thus, no one of them by itself can be called the Good, and they are not “ingredients” of the Good. It is only together in an indistinct union of these three qualities that the Good is the Good. This indistinct unity of measure/proportion, beauty, and truth is necessitated by the essential Unity of the Good Itself.⁸⁴

So again, how is the ranking of these three characteristics to be understood? A better explanation is required, and a simple one is available. There are three relevant passages: (1) 66a6–8 “first comes what is somehow connected with measure, the measured and the timely, and whatever else is to be considered similar.” (2) 66b1–3 “The second rank goes to the well-proportioned and beautiful, the perfect, the self-sufficient, and whatever else belongs in that family.” (3) 66b5–6 “If you give the third rank, as I divine, to reason and intelligence, you cannot stray far from the truth.” In both of the first two passages, it is not measure *qua* measure, proportion *qua* proportion, or beauty *qua* beauty that is ranked. Rather, it is things “concerning measure” (“περὶ μέτρον” and “the measured” [μέτριοι]) in the first passage, and things “concerning proportion and beauty” (περὶ τὸ σύμμετρον καὶ καλὸν) rather than proportion or beauty itself in the second passage. So in the first two passages, it is clear that what is ranked is not Measure, Proportion, or Beauty but things that are characterized by measure, proportion, or beauty. Or to use more familiar platonic language, things that participate in Measure, Proportion, or Beauty.

But the case is different in the third passage. It is not things concerning (περὶ) reason which are ranked third; rather, it is “mind and thought” (νοῦν καὶ φρόνησιν) which are put third. Nevertheless, the same possibility exists here as for the first two passages. Mind/Reason (νοῦς) can be understood in two ways, and Plato draws both of these understandings out earlier in the dialogue. In discussing whether reason or pleasure is the good and after Socrates has demonstrated that pleasure cannot be the

⁸³ 65a3–5 (emphasis added).

⁸⁴ But as should also be clear, that the Good consists of these three qualities in a unity also undercuts any notion of the Good as a simple unity. We will discuss this in more detail below.

good, Protarchus says, “Nor is your reason the good, Socrates, and the same complaint applies to it.” Socrates then replies, “It may apply to *my* reason, Philebus, but certainly not to the true, the divine reason, I should think. It is in quite a different condition.”⁸⁵ Plato distinguishes here between reason and Reason, between human reason and Divine Reason. The difference is between *having* a mind and *being* Mind. As Perl notes in his discussion on the *Timaeus*, “the Demiurge is not a being who has a mind (νοῦν ἔχον), but rather *is* mind, (νοῦς) itself.”⁸⁶ Given the first two passages do not rank measure, proportion, and beauty themselves but rather things which have measure, proportion, and beauty, it should be recognized that here too it is not Reason Itself which is ranked but rather the reason of rational beings, that is, things which have reason. This is further supported if, as noted, Reason is one with measure/proportion, beauty, and truth, and Reason and Limit are one.

Given all of this, the following understanding is possible. If Unity/Limit is the Good, then something beautiful reflects unity less than something characterized primarily by measure, and something characterized by truth reflects unity less than beauty. It is only the degree to which things participate in Unity that makes them appear with a distinct character, for example, more unity makes things appear more measured (e.g., numbers), somewhat less unity makes things appear beautiful, (e.g., art), and still less unity grants truth. It is not that the three are separate or higher than one another; rather, it is that less unity in something that participates in Unity makes different characteristics more apparent. So it is not that these aspects themselves are ranked, but things manifest these aspects differently to the degree in which they participate in Unity. In themselves, the three characteristics are one.

Regarding the second question that needed to be addressed, namely how Reason is the Cause of the Good, and yet is identified with the three aspects of the Good, and yet again is of the third rank, the last part of the question has been answered: it is not Reason that is ranked third, but rather things which have reason. Nevertheless, the question remains, How is Reason the cause of the Good, if the Good, Limit, and Reason are identified? The simple answer is that Reason is not the cause of the Good; rather, it is the cause of goodness in things which are good. Just as it was

⁸⁵ 22c3–6 (emphasis in the translation).

⁸⁶ Perl, Eric D., “The Demiurge and the Forms: A Return to the Ancient Interpretation of Plato’s *Timaeus*,” *Ancient Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (1998): 83.

seen that measure does not make the Good good, but it is insofar as things participate in measure that they have goodness. Thus, it is insofar as things are rational, limited, and thereby ordered, that they are good. This fits with Plato's claim in 23c9–d8 that the fourth kind, the Demiurge/Reason is the cause of the “mixture of Limit and Unlimited” (emphasis added), especially since, as has already been shown, Plato understands both Forms and particular things to be a mixture, that is, a relation, of The Good/One/Limit and the Indefinite Dyad/Great-Small/Unlimited.⁸⁷ If, then, Reason/Demiurge is in fact identical with Limit/the Good, how does it impose Limit on the Unlimited? Precisely by imposing itself on the Unlimited, and by imposing itself upon the Unlimited, it makes things, both Forms and particulars, ordered, that is, rational.⁸⁸

From this understanding, a more detailed understanding of Plato's First Principle(s) can be drawn. Limit and Reason, united as the One, constitute what Plato calls elsewhere The Good. But we also have an indefinite Principle, the Unlimited, which functions as the material substrate upon which Limit is imposed to generate all things, both Forms and particulars. The indefinite character of the Unlimited in the *Philebus* is manifested in oppositional terminology (i.e., More/Less, Hot/Cold, etc.). But while the Unlimited is indefinite, it also consists of Unity. It is not multiple; it is not many in the sense that it consists of many distinct parts or aspects. As Plato says at *Philebus* 24c7–25a1, “Whatever seems to us to become ‘more and less’, or susceptible to ‘strong and mild’ or to

⁸⁷ This also shows how knowledge works. We have already seen that it is the Forms which are “knowable” for Plato, and they are knowable precisely because Reason gives them order. As the Sun Analogy (*Republic*, Bk. VI, 507b–509c) shows, the Good makes the Forms intelligible. It does so by imposing Limit/Reason Itself upon the Unlimited. By imposing the Forms on the Unlimited, particulars are generated (as we will see in the *Timaeus*). But this, the level of the particulars, is a second-level “knowledge”, because it is derivative of Reason. This second-level “knowledge” is what Plato designates as “opinion”. It is not always true, because it is a mixture of a mixture, and so less “pure” (or perhaps “perfect” is a better word).

⁸⁸ Although it bears repeating, particular things are only derivatively rational, that is, knowable. They are not knowable in themselves. This is because, as Aristotle states, the Unlimited/Dyad functions as matter on both the level of the Forms and on the level of particulars (*Metaphysics* I(A).6 988a8–14), and so the level of particulars has a compounded material state, which material state makes them unknowable, as Simplicius notes, “Plato in his utterances *On the Good* said that the Great and Small were Matter, and also said that this Matter was infinite, and that all sensible things were contained by the Infinite, and were unknowable on account of their material, infinite and fluid nature.” (Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines*, 440. (Simplicius, Commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, 207a18, Volume 9, page 503, lines 12–15).)

‘too much’ and all of that kind, all that we ought to subsume under the genus of the unlimited as its unity.” Thus, the Unlimited is the unity of More/Less, Great/Small, and so just as Limit is One, so also is the Unlimited. Further, just as the Unlimited is indefinite and a unity, so also Limit is One and indefinite, that is, the One is not a simple unity. As was shown above, the Good, as Plato says, cannot be captured by “one form” (μῑ ἰδέα) and therefore is constituted by measure/proportion, beauty, and truth. But measure/proportion, beauty, and truth are not parts or elements of the Good. They themselves “should by right be treated as a unity”. Thus, the Good is constituted by different forms which together are unified: it is three which are distinct but one. The Good is, therefore, not a simple unity but an indefinite unity. Further, as already noted, Plato’s dialogue *Parmenides* demonstrates that the First Principle cannot be simply One (nor, for that matter, Many). But the fact that it cannot be captured by one form (ἰδέα) also demonstrates that it is beyond the Forms, as Plato said in the *Republic*. This lack of simple unity indicates a lack of determination, since it is not itself limited. In other words, Limit itself cannot be the cause of Limit, for the same reason measure cannot be the cause of the goodness of the Good: it would place Limit above Limit, that is, something would necessarily impose limit on Limit. So just as the indefinite Unlimited, Indefinite Dyad, is both Indefinite and one, so Limit, the Good, is both One and indefinite.

THE TIMAEUS

Now it requires to be seen how the Good/One/Demiurge and the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad appear in the *Timaeus*. According to Perl, the *Timaeus* is “an account of the origin and nature of the sensible cosmos”.⁸⁹ While it may be true that in the *Timaeus* it is the world of becoming, the sensible world, the realm of particulars, whose generation is primarily being discussed, nevertheless, Plato reveals significant insights into the more primordial levels of reality. In the dialogue, Plato says, “Now

⁸⁹ Perl, “The Demiurge and the Forms: A Return to the Ancient Interpretation of Plato’s *Timaeus*,” 81. Perl is not alone in this assessment. For example, see also: Demos, “The *Timaeus* is an exposition of the world of generation; as generation is an image of being, so an account of it is only an image of the truth.” (Demos, Raphael, “The Receptacle,” *The Philosophical Review* 45, no. 6 (1936): 535.) and Gill, “The *Timaeus* is Plato’s account of the physical world, given through his spokesman Timaeus.” (Gill, Mary Louise, “Matter and Flux in Plato’s ‘Timaeus’,” *Phronesis* 32, no. 1 (1987): 36–37.)

everything that comes to be must of necessity come to be by the agency of some cause, for it is impossible for anything to come to be without a cause.”⁹⁰ Just as in the *Philebus*, Plato calls this “cause” the Demiurge (δημιουργός). And again just as in the *Philebus*, the *Timaeus* identifies the Demiurge with Reason (νοῦς). For example, *Timaeus* 39e7–9 says, “he [the Demiurge] determined that the living thing he was making should possess the same kinds and numbers of living things as those which, *according to the discernment of Intellect*, are contained within the real Living Thing” (emphasis added). And more explicitly in 47e3–48a2, “Now in all but a brief part of the discourse I have just completed I have presented what has been crafted by Intellect. But I need to match this account by providing a comparable one concerning the things that have come about by Necessity. For this ordered world is of mixed birth: it is the offspring of a union of Necessity and Intellect.” Perl also recognizes this identification of the Demiurge and Mind. After quoting 29a2–b2,⁹¹ he states, “To call the maker ‘ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων’, the best of causes or of explanatory factors, is thus equivalent to calling him intellect (νοῦς).”⁹² And he goes even further saying, “The central meaning of the *Timaeus* is that the principal explanation (αἰτία) of the sensible world is intelligence, which, regarded as the act of thinking, is called the Demiurge or νοῦς, and, regarded as the content of thought, is called the paradigm or the forms.”⁹³

But in order to fully understand the role the Demiurge and the principles One/Limit and Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited play in the *Timaeus*, two passages deserve close scrutiny. The first begins at 35a1.

⁹⁰ 28a4–5.

⁹¹ “If this world is beautiful and its Demiurge good, it is clear that he looked toward the eternal [paradigm]; but if what is not right for anyone to say [is true], toward that which is generated. Now it is clear to all that [he looked] toward the eternal; for it is the most beautiful of generated things, and he is the best of causes. Having, then, been generated thus, it was crafted according to what is apprehended by reason and thought and remains the same; and these things being so, there is every necessity that this world is an image of something,” Perl’s translation.

⁹² Perl, “The Demiurge and the Forms: A Return to the Ancient Interpretation of Plato’s *Timaeus*,” 82.

⁹³ Ibid., 81. We have already seen Perl identify the Demiurge and Mind in our discussion of the *Philebus*, when we cited his claim that “the Demiurge is not a being who has a mind (νοῦν ἔχον), but rather *is* mind, νοῦς itself” (ibid., 83).

In between the *Being* that is indivisible and always changeless, and the one that is divisible and comes to be in the corporeal realm, he mixed a third, intermediate form of being, derived from the other two. Similarly, he made a mixture of the *Same*, and then one of the *Different*, in between their indivisible and their corporeal, divisible counterparts. And he took the three mixtures and mixed them together to make a uniform mixture, forcing the *Different*, which was hard to mix, into conformity with the *Same*. Now when he had mixed these two together with *Being*, and from the three had made a single mixture, he redivided the whole mixture into as many parts as his task required, each part remaining a mixture of the *Same*, the *Different*, and of *Being*.⁹⁴ (emphasis in the translation)

In this passage, the allusion to the *Sophist* is unmistakable. Cornford notes, “This passage is one of many in which he is writing for readers already versed in his own later thought, without regard for the uninstructed, who would be left wholly in the dark. The terms Existence, Sameness, Difference, would be simply unintelligible to anyone who had not read and understood the *Sophist*.”⁹⁵ Thus, it is important to note that Plato is describing the nature of the Forms *Being*, *Same*, and *Difference* both insofar as they are used to generate the world of becoming and here, in the passage above, insofar as they are used to generate the “world soul”. Thus, the role of the Demiurge as cause in both the generation of world of becoming and the nature of the three primordial Forms (*Being*, *Same*, and *Difference*) is here laid out. In noting that it is not only the world of becoming described but also the role and nature of the Forms *Being*, *Same*, and *Difference* that are described, it is apparent that Plato’s concern is not simply the realm of appearances.⁹⁶

It is also important to note that generation comes about both by mixing and by separating off. In the above passage, Plato says the *Being* that is a mixture of *Being* which is indivisible and *Being* which is divisible (and “comes to be in the corporeal realm”) is a third “form of being” (οὐσίᾱς εἶδος), which is “derived from” the mixture of other two forms of *Being* (ἐξ ἀμφοῖν lit. “out of both” or “from both”), and further, he states that after the Demiurge mixes the three intermediate forms together, he then

⁹⁴ 35a1–b3.

⁹⁵ Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, 61.

⁹⁶ Gill suggests further that in the section from 47e3 to 53b5, Plato is describing a “pre-cosmos”, “the state of things awaiting that organization [i.e., the organization of the universe by the Demiurge].” (Gill, “Matter and Flux in Plato’s ‘Timaeus’,” 37.)

“redivided the whole mixture into as many parts as his task required”. So it is clear that generation involves both mixing and separating off, and entails relationality insofar as that which is generation is constituted by a relation of Being, Same, and Difference, which are, as will be shown, also constituted by their own internal relationality.

What is the nature of these three “kinds”, that is, the Indivisible, Divisible, and Intermediate kinds? A deeper understanding is necessary here. Plato himself does not offer much help in the way of clear explanation here. What is clear is that there is Being which is eternal and indivisible, Being which is divisible and “comes to be in the corporeal world” (περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένης—literally, “coming to be about the material things”), and this “third kind of being” which is “derived from” the other two.

Cornford asserts, “Proclus construed it in the only possible way, and his interpretation, once disengaged from the irrelevant intricacies of his own theology, is obviously correct.”⁹⁷ So how does Proclus explain this? Regarding the Indivisible and Divisible forms of Being, Proclus says, “By indivisible Being he [Plato] means that which is intellectual and participates in eternity with respect to the entirety of itself. But by divisible he means that which is in the realm of bodies, inseparable from extension, and which has been allotted an existence (*hyparxis*) that is entirely temporal.”⁹⁸ In a parallel passage, Proclus states, “Therefore, we say that ‘indivisible Being’ means all intelligible Being and intellectual Being, both universal (*olikos*) and particular (*merikos*), as well as immaterial and separate, and whether prior to eternity or in eternity. But ‘divisible’ includes all Being which proceeds into the realm of bodies.”⁹⁹ If Proclus’ interpretation is correct, then this indicates that Being is Itself one but manifests in two realms. Whether it manifests in the intelligible/eternal realm or the corporeal/temporal realm, it is *Being* which so manifests. It is not two Beings of different kinds, but one Being manifesting in two ways. This becomes more clear if it is remembered that the Being which is divisible is *not* described Plato as *itself* changing or corporeal/material. Rather, it *comes to be* in the corporeal realm (περὶ τὰ σώματα γιγνομένης—literally,

⁹⁷ Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, 59.

⁹⁸ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, trans. Dirk Baltzly, vol. IV (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 111. Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are taken from Proclus. *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*. Translated by Dirk Baltzly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 101.

“coming to be about the material things”). Proclus sees the Intermediate form, derived from the two, as the Soul Itself. According to Proclus, Plato is asserting “not only that the Demiurge made the soul to be a[n] intermediate between the indivisible Being and that which is in relation to bodies, but ... also ... that it [the soul] is an intermediate between that which is always the same and that which comes to be.”¹⁰⁰ And throughout, Proclus refers to the intermediate as the soul. However, this means not that the soul is itself the intermediate *form of Being* which is derived from the other two *forms of Being*, but rather that the soul is itself intermediate between the ungenerated and eternal and that which comes to be and is temporal. This must be the case since, as Plato clearly says, the soul is composed of the mixture of the three intermediate forms of Being, Same, and Difference. Regarding the intermediate form of Being, Cornford points out that it is “Existence, compounded of both [the indivisible and divisible kinds], *which is proper to the soul*”¹⁰¹ (emphasis added). Thus, the intermediate forms of Being, Same, and Difference are those forms of Being, Same, and Difference which are proper to the soul. Thus, the Indivisible is that aspect of the forms which is eternal and ungenerated, the Divisible is that aspect which belongs to bodies (but, significantly, is not itself corporeal), and the Intermediate is the mixture of these forms proper to the soul.

But how are Being, Same, and Difference themselves to be understood? Regarding these three Forms, Proclus notes, “It is necessary that each of these genera be in all things, and that Being is the most primary one to be established in them since it is like the very hearth of these things, a monad and analogous in rank to the One. After it come Sameness and Difference, which are analogous to Limit and Unlimit respectively.”¹⁰² The distinction here between the One and Limit is interesting, since it has already been shown that Limit and the One are identified for Plato. Proclus’ statement can be explained if it is understood that he is not saying that Being *is* the One, the Same *is* Limit, and Difference *is* Unlimit; rather, he says they are *analogous* (ἀνά λόγον) to these principles. Later, Proclus discusses the relation of these genera to the Principles Limit and Unlimit: “Sameness is the result of Limited and Unlimited (though it is rather more finito-form [Limit]) and the Different is from these things as well (being rather more

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 112.

¹⁰¹ Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, 63.

¹⁰² Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*, IV, 93–94.

infinito-form [Unlimit]), [and] Being proceeds in accord with both [Limit and Unlimit] equally ... We thus conceive of the first species of Difference as the Unlimited having a small admixture of the Limited, and the Sameness as being only slightly less than the Limited.”¹⁰³ From this, it is clear that all three forms/genera are constituted by Limit and Unlimit: Sameness is dominated by Limit, Difference is dominated by Unlimit, and Being partakes of both equally. How does this make Being like the One? It is like the One in that it is not dominated by either Limit or Unlimit. It is uniform. It is *not* the One (since the One is Limit), but it is *like* the One in its uniformity. This shows how, according to Proclus, Being is like the One, Sameness like Limit, and Difference like the Unlimited. And here, the inherent relationality of the three Forms (Being, Same, and Different) is revealed.

What seems to be missing from *Timaeus* 35a1–b3 is a discussion of, or reference to, the One, Limit, and Unlimited themselves. If Sayre is correct when he notes “the quite straightforward parallel between the Demiurge and the ‘Cause of generation’ (αἰτίαν ... γενέσεως 27b9) in the *Philebus*”,¹⁰⁴ then a clear picture comes together. Just as the Demiurge in the *Philebus* generated things by mixing Limit and the Unlimited, and this turned out to be the Demiurge imposing himself as Limit upon the Unlimited, so here the Demiurge generates both a “third form” of Being, Same, and Difference by “mixing” the Indivisible and Divisible Forms of these Kinds and generates the Soul by mixing these three intermediate kinds and separating them off. Further, if, as Proclus asserts, Being, Sameness, and Difference are themselves constituted by different ratios of Limit and the Unlimited, then these Three Kinds must be generated by the Demiurge mixing Limit and the Unlimited in them as well. Given this understanding, the three different kinds, that is, Indivisible, Divisible, and Intermediate, begin to come into focus. Proclus has already shown that the Indivisible belongs to the realm of the eternal and unchanging, so the Indivisible Form of Being must be the Great Kind Being in its eternal, unchanging nature. In other words, the Indivisible is Being in its Oneness.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 124–125. Proclus makes clear his understanding of finito-form (περατοειδής) and infinito-form (ἀπειροειδής) in *The Elements of Theology* 159, where he describes “περατοειδής” as “that in which Limit prevails” (ἐν ᾧ τὰ τοῦ πέρατος κρατεῖ) and “ἀπειροειδής” as that “in which the element of Infinity preponderates”. (Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, trans. E. R. Dodds, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 141.)

¹⁰⁴ Sayre, Kenneth M., “The Role of the *Timaeus* in the Development of Plato’s Late Ontology,” *Ancient Philosophy* 18, no. 1 (1998): 115.

Just as the Intermediate Form of Being was Being proper to the Soul, so the Indivisible Form of Being is the One/Limit proper to the Great Kind Being, the One/Limit *in* the Great Kind Being. Again, as has been seen, the Intermediate is the both the Indivisible and Divisible Form as constituting the Soul, and so the Soul is both temporal and eternal, both changing and unchanging.¹⁰⁵ So the Intermediate Form of Being (which is in the Soul) is the mixture of the One/Limit proper to the Great Kind Being together with Divisible Form of Being.¹⁰⁶ But what of this Divisible Form? As was seen, it comes to be in the corporeal realm but is not itself corporeal, so it is related to the corporeal in some way. That the Divisible Form is like the corporeal but not itself corporeal indicates that it is to be understood as Matter, and since, as has been seen, the Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited functions as Matter for Limit (both in the generation of Forms and in the generation of particulars),¹⁰⁷ then at this point, the nature of the Divisible Form appears clear. The Divisible Form here is the Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited upon which the Demiurge imposes Himself as Limit, generating the Intermediate Form of Being. If this is correct, then the Divisible Form of Being will properly be understood to be that aspect of the Great Kind Being which is constituted by the Unlimited, that is, the Unlimited proper to the Great Kind Being. Proclus also notes this when, although following a different inquiry, notes, “whenever Being is the result of Limit and Unlimit, then when the Limit predominates over the other, it makes the indivisible Being. But when the Unlimited predominates, it makes the divisible Being.”¹⁰⁸ But how is it possible to “mix from both” (ἐξ ἀμφοῖν ... συνεκράσατο) if they are already united in the Great Kind Itself (regardless whether that Great Kind is Being, Same, or Different)? It must be remembered that the Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited plays a dual role. It plays the role of Matter for the Forms and the role of Matter for particulars. To understand this more clearly, it is now necessary to examine the second passage, the passage that deals with the Receptacle.

According to Timaeus, the original account was incomplete and a second parallel account is required. Introducing this new account, Timaeus says,

¹⁰⁵ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, IV, 112. (II.147.23ff).

¹⁰⁶ It seems clear to me that this analysis applies to the Same and Difference as well.

¹⁰⁷ See section “The “Unwritten” Doctrines”.

¹⁰⁸ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, IV, 99.

Now in all but a brief part of the discourse I have just completed I have presented what has been crafted by Intellect. But I need to match this account by providing a comparable one concerning the things that have come about by Necessity. For this ordered world is of mixed birth: it is the offspring of a union of Necessity and Intellect. Intellect prevailed over Necessity by persuading it to direct most of the things that come to be toward what is best, and the result of this subjugation of Necessity to wise persuasion was the initial formation of this universe. So if I'm to tell the story of how it really came to be in this way, I'd also have to introduce the character of the Straying Cause-how it is its nature to set things adrift.¹⁰⁹

And a bit further, "The new starting point in my account of the universe needs to be more complex than the earlier one ... Now ... it appears that our account compels us to attempt to illuminate in words a kind that is difficult and vague. What must we suppose it to do and to be? This above all: it is a *receptacle* of all becoming"¹¹⁰ (emphasis in the translation). So in addition to the Intellect/Demiurge there are three further concepts that play a role in the origin of all things: Necessity, the "Straying Cause", and the Receptacle. How are they to be understood, and what is their relation? Are they three designations for the same idea? If so, what is this idea which they represent? Given that Plato here says the introduction of Necessity to the discussion thereby requires the introduction of the Straying Cause, it seems natural to equate the Straying Cause with Necessity, and scholars such as Cornford have done so.¹¹¹ What might seem more strange than identifying Necessity with the Straying Cause is Cornford's interpretation of Necessity as "random and without order".¹¹² But as he rightly notes, necessity has somewhat different connotations for

¹⁰⁹ 47e3–48a7.

¹¹⁰ 48e2–3, 49a3–6.

¹¹¹ See Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, 162ff.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 172. In this interpretation, he is following Grote who, according to Cornford, identifies Necessity as "the indeterminant, the inconstant".

the Greeks than it does today. Cornford, citing Aristotle,¹¹³ states that necessity “is opposed to purpose, and linked with spontaneity, coincidence, chance”. According to this understanding of necessity it may be the case that something “‘comes about’ by causes that cannot act otherwise than they do”.¹¹⁴ This, nevertheless, may happen by chance. Cornford, referencing the *Timaeus*, explains as follows:

The function of bone is to protect from injury the seat of life, the brain and marrow. To that end bone must be hard. But its very hardness makes it too brittle and inflexible, and also liable to decay under excessive heat. Accordingly the skeleton needs to be wrapped about with soft and yielding flesh. The brittleness is a concomitant of the hardness, and it can be described both as necessary or inevitable and as ‘accidental’ (συμβεβηκός). The ideas of necessity and chance are once more associated in the notion of the necessary accident. In this instance brittleness *happens to be an inevitable* but undesirable concomitant of the useful quality, hardness.¹¹⁵ (emphasis in the original)

Necessity, hence, does not exclude the possibility of chance or randomness; rather, it is contrasted to purpose and order. Thus, Miller, putting Cornford’s thought together, summarizes his view: Necessity “is ‘the chaotic and disorderly’ in the world, for the world ‘contains motions and active powers which are not instituted by the divine Reason and are

¹¹³ See *Physics*, II.8.198b17–198b33. “A difficulty presents itself: why should not nature work, not for the sake of something, nor because it is better so, but just as the sky rains, not in order to make the corn grow, but of necessity [ἐξ ἀνάγκης]? (What is drawn up must cool, and what has been cooled must become water and descend, the result of this being that the corn grows.) Similarly if a man’s crop is spoiled on the threshing-floor, the rain did not fall for the sake of this—in order that the crop might be spoiled—but that result just followed. Why then should it not be the same with the parts in nature, e.g., that our teeth should come up of necessity—the front teeth sharp, fitted for tearing, the molars broad and useful for grinding down the food—since they did not arise for this end, but it was merely a coincident result; and so with all other parts in which we suppose that there is purpose? Wherever then all the parts came about just what they would have been if they had come to be for an end, such things survived, being organized spontaneously in a fitting way; whereas those which grew otherwise perished and continue to perish, as Empedocles says his ‘man-faced oxprogeny’ did.” (Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, I, 339.)

¹¹⁴ Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, 166.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

perpetually producing undesirable effects”¹¹⁶ If this view is correct, then Necessity is associated with indeterminacy, randomness, and chance.¹¹⁷

But what of the Straying Cause? What is it, and in what sense can Necessity be identified with it? The passage cited seems to associate it in some sense with motion, that is, “how it is its nature to set things adrift” (ἡ φέρειν πέφυκεν).¹¹⁸ Cornford, in identifying the Straying Cause with Necessity, even states, “he [Plato] speaks of this second factor, Necessity, as an Errant [Straying] Cause, *whose manner of causing motion must be taken into account*”¹¹⁹ (emphasis added). And Miller, who does not identify the Straying Cause with Necessity, concludes his discussion of the Straying Cause by associating it directly with the Receptacle: “What is this cause? I suggest ... that the ‘wandering cause’ is a factor in what Plato calls the ‘shaking’ or ‘winnowing motion’ of the Receptacle.”¹²⁰ The Straying Cause must be recognized as, in some sense, a principle of Motion, but it is not simply a principle or cause of motion; it is itself in motion. It is the *straying* (πλανωμένη) cause (αἰτία), not simply the cause that is the cause of straying. The cause itself moves. Miller notes that if Plato is to be consistent, then the Straying Cause and how it moves “refer to the forthcoming account of the Receptacle and how it shakes”. And he further notes, “If this is right, the expression ‘wandering [straying] cause’ may be better rendered as ‘the cause that wanders.’”¹²¹ With this, then, in mind, if it is recalled that Motion, as well as Rest, is one of the Five Great Kinds in the *Sophist*, then the relation of the Straying Cause to the ultimate principles responsible for generating the cosmos can be seen.

It has been shown above that three of the Five Great Kinds (Being, Same, and Difference) are associated with the principles One/Limit and the Unlimited, but can the other two, Rest and Motion, also be associated with these principles? Just as Sameness is associated with Limit and

¹¹⁶ Miller, Dana R., *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), 67. It must be recognized, however, that Miller's view is different from both Cornford's and the one I am following. See pp. 66ff for his view as well as his discussion of other views.

¹¹⁷ For other interpretations of Necessity, see Demos, “The Receptacle,” 545. and Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus*, 66ff.

¹¹⁸ Miller translates this as “how it naturally moves”. (Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus*, 67.)

¹¹⁹ Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, 163.

¹²⁰ Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus*, 69–70.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

Difference is associated with Unlimit, the same applies to Rest and Motion respectively. Recall that Proclus states,

Whenever Being is the result of Limit and Unlimit, then when the Limit predominates over the other, it makes the indivisible Being. But when the Unlimited predominates, it makes the divisible Being. And when there is an equal composition of Limit and Unlimit, the result is the intermediate [kind of Being]. Correspondingly, whenever Sameness predominates over Difference, it makes the indivisible Sameness and Difference, but when Difference predominates over Sameness, then we get the divisible [kind of Sameness and Difference]. And when the composition is equivalent, then we get the intermediate kind.¹²²

This reaffirms the conclusion reached above that Sameness is associated with Limit and Difference is associated with Unlimit. This is revealed here insofar as whenever Sameness dominates Difference, then the Indivisible (which is characterized by Limit) Sameness and Difference results, and when Difference dominates, the Divisible (characterized by Unlimit) results. In the same passage, it can be seen that the same relationship occurs in regard to Rest and Motion: “whenever Rest predominates over Motion, then there is the indivisible kind [of Motion and Rest], but when Motion rules over Rest, then we have the divisible kind.”¹²³ Just as Sameness is associated with and dominated by Limit, so also is Rest. Just as Difference is associated with and dominated by Unlimit, so also is Motion. Proclus is even more explicit further down: “the corporeal is [said to be] akin (*philos*) to the Unlimited, to Difference and to Motion.”¹²⁴ Hence, it is clear that Motion belongs to the Unlimited/Dyad. This indicates that the Straying Cause, since its very nature is to cause Motion, is itself intimately associated with the Unlimited. The connection, then, of four concepts now becomes clear: the Straying Cause is associated with Motion, which is in turn associated with the Unlimited, and since the Unlimited is itself characterized by disorder, chaos (insofar as chaos is lack of order), indeterminacy/indefiniteness (all of which are characteristics of the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad) Necessity too can be added to this

¹²² Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus*, IV, 99.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 100. We have already seen that to be corporeal is to be characterized by the Indefinite Dyad/Matter/the Unlimited for Plato.

association. So to clarify: The Straying Cause, Motion, and Necessity are all aspects or manifestations of the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad.

The picture that develops from this understanding is as follows. Since, as Plato states, “the result of this subjugation of Necessity to wise persuasion [by Intellect/Demiurge] was the initial formation of this universe”, it is Intelligence/Demiurge dominating Necessity that generates the cosmos. As was seen in the *Philebus*, what this entails is that Limit (Intellect/Demiurge) applying Itself to the Unlimited (Necessity/Straying Cause) generates the universe. But what of the Receptacle? How does it relate to this process?

Plato describes the Receptacle as the material component of things. He compares it to someone “molding gold into every shape there is, going on non-stop remolding one shape into the next”.¹²⁵ He then adds, “If someone then were to point at one of them and ask you, ‘What *is* it?’ your safest answer by far, with respect to truth, would be to say, ‘gold,’ but never ‘triangle’ or any of the other shapes that come to be in the gold, as though it *is* these, because they change even while you’re making the statement”¹²⁶ (emphasis in the translation). This indicates that the Receptacle takes on or receives the Form of things but never becomes any of the things whose Form it receives. Plato explains:

We must always refer to it [the Receptacle] by the same term, for it does not depart from its own character in any way. Not only does it always receive all things, it has never in any way whatever taken on any characteristic similar to any of the things that enter it. Its nature is to be available for anything to make its impression upon, and it is modified, shaped and reshaped by the things that enter it. These are the things that make it appear different at different times. The things that enter and leave it are imitations of those things that always are, imprinted after their likeness in a marvellous way that is hard to describe. This is something we shall pursue at another time. For the moment, we need to keep in mind three types of things: that which comes to be, that in which it comes to be, and that after which the thing coming to be is modeled, and which is the source of its coming to be. It is in fact appropriate to compare the receiving thing to a mother, the source to a father, and the nature between them to their offspring. We also must understand that if the imprints are to be varied, with all the varieties there to see, this thing upon which the imprints are to be formed could not be well pre-

¹²⁵ 50a5–6.

¹²⁶ 50a7–b4.

pared for that role if it were not itself devoid of any of those characters that it is to receive from elsewhere. For if it resembled any of the things that enter it, it could not successfully copy their opposites or things of a totally different nature whenever it were to receive them. It would be showing its own face as well. This is why the thing that is to receive in itself all the elemental kinds must be totally devoid of any characteristics.¹²⁷

This passage shows that the Receptacle itself is indefinite; it has no characteristics of its own. It receives “things” which leave their “impressions” upon it. There are three things: (1) that which “comes to be” [τὸ γιγνόμενον], that is, particular things, (2) that “in which it comes to be” [τὸ ἐν ᾧ γίγνεται], and (3) that “after which the thing coming to be is modelled” [τὸ ὅθεν ἀφομοιούμενον φύεται τὸ γιγνόμενον], that is, the Forms.¹²⁸ Thus, the Forms impress themselves upon the Receptacle which produces particular things, images of the Forms. Strikingly, this is very similar to the previous passage in which the Demiurge/Limit imposes itself upon the Unlimited to generate the cosmos. Gill notes the similarity between the role of the Demiurge in the earlier account and the role of the Forms here: “In the first section Plato identified not the Forms but the craftsman as the father (29c3). It is both striking and important that here his role as father has been claimed by the Forms.”¹²⁹ What this indicates is the role the Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited plays as Matter on the level of the particulars. In the earlier account, we saw the role of the Demiurge in imposing Limit on the Unlimited to generate the Forms or more precisely the Five Great Kinds. Here, the Forms impressing themselves upon the Receptacle generate the phenomena, particulars. The fact that the Receptacle has no characteristics is also significant: it is Indefinite and Unlimited.

That the discussion is primarily about the elements Earth, Air, Fire, and Water further supports this account if understood in its proper context. That the elements Earth, Air, Fire, and Water are not meant to be taken too literally is indicated by Timaeus’ hesitancy to place too much emphasis on them as true principles: “We tend to posit them as the elemental ‘letters’ of the universe and tell people they are its ‘principles’ on the

¹²⁷ 50b6–c5.

¹²⁸ Gill also identifies the third type of thing as the Forms. (See Gill, “Matter and Flux in Plato’s ‘Timaeus’,” 38–39.)

¹²⁹ Ibid., 38. Although it must be recognized that the importance Gill ascribes to this is different than the importance I will ascribe to it.

assumption that they know what fire and the other three are. In fact, however, they shouldn't even be compared to syllables. Only a very unenlightened person might be expected to make such a comparison.”¹³⁰ It also merits noting that the connection to Heraclitus here is difficult to miss. The same relation between the elements that we saw in Heraclitus Fragments DK22B76b and DK22B76c is manifest here in 49b7–c7:

First, we see (or think we see) the thing that we have just now been calling water condensing and turning to stones and earth. Next, we see this same thing dissolving and dispersing, turning to wind and air, and air, when ignited, turning to fire. And then we see fire being condensed and extinguished and turning back to the form of air, and air coalescing and thickening and turning back into cloud and mist. When these are compressed still more we see them turning into flowing water, which we see turning to earth and stones once again. In this way, then, they transmit their coming to be one to the other in a cycle, or so it seems.¹³¹

Plato's intention here is to draw the reader's attention to the Heraclitean view in which all things are in flux. The hesitancy of Timaeus to identify the Elements with principles, however, indicates that Plato is not committed to the view of the four traditional elements as ultimate principles. They do, nevertheless, represent principles in this discussion of the generation of the world of change, the world of appearances. The elements of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water are intended to indicate the Forms. This is shown first by Plato's use of them in this passage as stand-ins for ultimate principles, and second by Plato's comment, noted above, that there are three things, one of which—namely, “that after which the thing coming to be is modelled”—has been identified as the Forms. Later, Plato explicitly indicates the Forms and associates them with these Elements: “Is there such a thing as a Fire *by itself*? Do all these things of which we always say that each of them is something ‘by itself’ really exist? ... If understanding and true opinion are distinct, then these ‘by themselves’ things definitely exist—these Forms, the objects not of our sense perception, but of our understanding only”¹³² (emphasis in the translation). Thus, the elements Earth,

¹³⁰ 48b6–c2.

¹³¹ We also noted this in our comments on 32a7–c2 above.

¹³² 51b7–c1, d3–d5 Gill recognizes the same thing in refuting Cherniss' view, “This [Cherniss' view] cannot be right. In fact, what really is fire is the Form of fire, not what we see.” (Gill, “Matter and Flux in Plato's ‘Timaeus’,” 41.)

Air, Fire, and Water indicate the Forms which, when impressed upon the Receptacle, generate phenomenal things, which are, according the traditional Greek view, constituted by these Four Elements. This reveals that what Plato is discussing here is the realm of appearance in which the Forms play the role that the Demiurge plays in the higher realm. So just as the Demiurge plays the role of the “father” in the higher realm, the realm in which the Forms are generated (see 37c6–7), so the Forms play the role of “father” on this realm in which particulars are generated (see 50d3). Hence, the Receptacle is the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad, functioning as Matter to particulars in the realm of the phenomena, and the Unlimited functions as the Matter of the Forms on the higher realm, the realm in which the Demiurge generates the Forms. As Demos notes, “the forms get embodiment in the Receptacle.”¹³³

It seems uncontroversial then, from what has already been said, to identify the Receptacle with the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad. However, how precisely the Receptacle represents the Unlimited merits examination, and in order to do this, two characteristics of the Receptacle warrant discussion: motion and space (χώρα). The association of motion with the Receptacle has already been alluded to, and the relation of Motion to the Unlimited has been made clear.¹³⁴ In 53a2–6 Plato says, “At that time the four kinds [earth, air, fire, and water] were being shaken by the receiver, which was itself agitating like a shaking machine, separating the kinds most unlike each other furthest apart and pushing those most like each other closest together into the same region.” Motion is an essential aspect of the Receptacle, governing how the Forms come to be in the world. But it is not simply that the Receptacle causes movement in the Forms; as Plato notes, it is “itself agitating” (κινουμένης αὐτῆς), indicating that its motion is not accidental to it but part of its nature. Further, in 30a2–6, Plato says, “The god wanted everything to be good and nothing to be bad so far as that was possible, and so he took over all that was visible-*not at rest but in discordant and disorderly motion*-and brought it from a state of disorder to one of order, because he believed that order was in every way,

¹³³ Demos, Raphael, “The Fundamental Conceptions of Plato’s Metaphysics,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 32, no. 21 (1935): 562. While Demos does indicate that the Receptacle functions as Matter, he is explicit in rejecting the idea that it is physical, Newtonian matter. (Demos, “The Receptacle,” 540.)

¹³⁴ See the discussion of the Straying Cause above and the quote from Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato’s Timaeus*, 70.

better than disorder” (emphasis added). This passage indicates a pre-cosmic Motion which plays a central role in the ordering of the universe.

A complication arises here, however. Plato says in *Laws* X, 896a6–b1, “Haven’t we got ourselves a satisfactory proof that soul is identical with the original source of the generation and motion of all past, present and future things and their contraries? After all, it has been shown to be the cause of all change and motion in everything.” How then can there be disorderly motion prior to the generation of the World Soul? Cornford identifies this “disorderly motion” with “chaos” and adds that this chaos “is not to be taken literally. If the cosmos had no beginning in time, there never was a chaos before order was introduced.”¹³⁵ He later adds, “It is now generally agreed that this disorderly condition can never have existed by itself at a time before order was introduced. Bodily motion cannot exist without a soul to cause it. The World-Soul was a creation of the Demiurge, who put reason in soul, and soul in body,” and he concludes that this chaos is, what he calls, “irrational Soul”.¹³⁶ Vlastos rightly argues against this interpretation, noting that “no such soul is mentioned in the *Timaios*”.¹³⁷ And in response to the problem posed by the *Laws*, he says, “*Laws* x is simply and purely an exercise in apologetics. It must establish the existence of the gods. It does not raise any issue which will not assist in the proof of this conclusion, so urgent for religion, so essential for the State. The argument turns on one question : Is soul prior to body?”¹³⁸ It is beyond the scope of this discussion to resolve all the complexities of this question in detail; nevertheless, an answer satisfactory for the purposes here can be given. It has already been noted that Motion is identified with the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad. If this is correct, then Motion, as the Indefinite Dyad, is one of the primordial principles of reality and cannot depend on anything else for its being and therefore cannot depend on the soul. But it does seem, from the passage just cited, that this “disorderly motion” is bodily motion. Plato says that the god, Demiurge, “took over all that was visible”. The corporeal has already made its appearance in this discussion, but it has not been sufficiently examined. It was seen above that Proclus said the corporeal is “akin” (φίλον) to the Unlimited. The

¹³⁵ Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato*, 176.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 203.

¹³⁷ Vlastos, Gregory, “The Disorderly Motion in the *Timaios*,” *The Classical Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1939): 77.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 78.

word “φίλον” is significant. It can mean “dear”, “friend”, or, as translated above, “akin”, as in “related to”. It indicates a very close and loving relationship. If it is recalled that Aristotle identified the Indefinite Dyad (or Unlimited) with Matter, then the interpretation here becomes clear. “Visible” does not refer to physical independent bodies; rather, it refers to Matter. If this is correct, then the “disorderly motion” upon which the Demiurge works is simply the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad. The phrase “*not at rest* but in discordant and disorderly motion” is, then, meant to contrast motion and rest, thus emphasizing the movement from disorder to order.¹³⁹

But what is the relation between the Receptacle itself, which is itself related to Motion, as has been seen, and this “disorderly motion”? Miller, in discussing 30a2–6, states, “Many commentators on this passage do not distinguish clearly between the shaking of the Receptacle and the disorderly motion of the pre-cosmos.” And he further notes, “no direct mention is made of the Receptacle in the account of the pre-cosmos.”¹⁴⁰ Miller may be correct in that no explicit mention of the Receptacle is made in the account of the pre-cosmos; however, if it is correct to identify the Receptacle with the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad, and Aristotle in *Metaphysics* I(A).6 988a8–14 is right in that there are two levels on which the Indefinite Dyad works, then the role of the Receptacle as the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad emerges more clearly. The discussion of “disorderly motion” on the pre-cosmic level, which is associated with the corporeal but not bodies, is a prelude to the discussion of the generation of the Soul by the Demiurge through the mixing of Being, Sameness, and Difference. With the introduction of “disorderly motion” Motion is introduced to the pre-cosmic, and with it, again, the Unlimited upon which the Demiurge works. It has also been seen that the Receptacle is the material component of things, or Matter, from which they are generated. It should be recalled that the Indefinite Dyad works on two levels: on the first level, it works in generating the Forms, but on the second level, it works in the generation, by means of the Forms, of particulars. So, the Receptacle is Matter, the Unlimited/Indefinite Dyad, at the level on which Matter and the Forms together generate particulars. The “shaking” of the Receptacle, or separating off of the Forms, is a description of the Forms being applied

¹³⁹ It is worth adding that this also emphasizes the remaining two Great Kinds, Motion and Rest, bring them into the picture.

¹⁴⁰ Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato's Timaeus*, 159.

upon the Unlimited and becoming particular, finding their own region to occupy. As Plato states, “as a result of the Receptacle’s agitation the masses of each of the kinds are separated from one another, with each occupying its own region.”¹⁴¹ This “shaking” of the Receptacle appears then as that which it truly is, that is, the Unlimited, in the “disorderly motion” of the pre-cosmos.

Next, the Receptacle as “space” (χώρα) requires examination. Plato never explicitly calls the Receptacle “space”, but many scholars have associated it with space.¹⁴² One of the most important of these scholars is Aristotle. In *Physics* IV(Δ) 2.209b 11–13, Aristotle says, “This is why Plato in the *Timaeus* says that matter and space are the same; for the ‘participant’ (μεταληπτικόν—literally, ‘capability of partaking of’ or ‘capability of receiving form’) and space are identical.”¹⁴³ That μεταληπτικόν or, as Barnes above translates it, “participant”, is the Receptacle seems clear enough.¹⁴⁴ But what does it mean to identify the Receptacle with space? A few lines later, in 209b15, Aristotle claims that Plato identified “place (τόπον) and space (χώραν)”. If this is so, then when the *Timaeus* says that the Receptacle’s shaking “explains how these different kinds [earth, air, fire, water] came to occupy different regions of space”,¹⁴⁵ Plato is simply asserting that the Receptacle gives the Forms their places in the universe. This is supported by 52a8–b1 in which Plato says that space “exists always and cannot be destroyed. It provides a fixed state (ἔδραν) for all things that come to be”. However, Miller based on a passage in the *Laws* notes a subtle distinction between ἔδραν (place or “fixed state” as translated by Zeyl) and χώρα (space). In *Laws* X, the Athenian says, “‘So, is it not the case that the stationary things are at rest and the moving things move in some χώρα?’ [Clinias] ‘Of course.’ [Athenian] ‘And some of them would do so in one ἔδρα (place) somewhere and some in many <places>?’”¹⁴⁶ Miller then distinguishes between space which is synonymous with place and space which contains multiple places, and in which movement from

¹⁴¹ 57c2–3.

¹⁴² For a discussion of the various views of the Receptacle as “space”, see Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato’s Timaeus*, 24ff.

¹⁴³ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 356.

¹⁴⁴ Miller discusses this passage from Aristotle in detail in Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato’s Timaeus*, 19ff.

¹⁴⁵ 53a6–7.

¹⁴⁶ 893c1–4 (Miller’s translation).

place to place can occur.¹⁴⁷ What is interesting here is that according to this understanding, motion and space are intimately associated: without space, motion cannot occur. Space is the *place* for motion. Miller then correctly notes that the identification of the Receptacle with space entails that the Receptacle “receives not just the bodies of the elements but *all* bodies whatsoever (see 50b6)”.¹⁴⁸ He, however, mistakenly goes on to reject this understanding, asserting also that this interpretation only arises in the nineteenth century and depends upon a post-Newtonian conception of “space”.¹⁴⁹ However, if we take seriously Aristotle’s claim that space is identified with matter for Plato and recognize that matter, in this context, is not the post-Cartesian understanding of matter as that which is extended, but rather matter understood as the “substrate” upon which sensible things come-to-be, which it certainly is for Aristotle,¹⁵⁰ then the picture makes sense. As has already been seen in reference to the Receptacle as Motion, the Receptacle is Matter which serves to give all sensible things their particularity or to phrase it somewhat differently, their distinction, their place, their space. It determines things as distinct, which is the very function of the Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited once it receives the One/Limit. And as sensible things, according to Plato, are constantly changing, they are constantly in motion, and so by giving sensible things their particularity, their sensibleness, the Receptacle imposes Motion upon them.

The *Timaeus* then shows the work of both the One/Good/Limit/Demiurge and the Indefinite Dyad/Matter/Receptacle/Unlimited in the generation of the universe. It is now apparent how, as Aristotle noted, the One/Good combines with the Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited/Matter to generate both the Forms and the particulars. The One imposes upon the Unlimited to generate Forms, and then in turn, the Forms are imposed upon the Receptacle to generate the particulars. Thus, as Demos notes, “The Unlimited and the Receptacle seem to play a similar role in the

¹⁴⁷ Miller, *The Third Kind in Plato’s Timaeus*, 132.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 138.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. In fairness, it must be noted that his reasons for rejecting this do not solely rest on the post-Newtonian notion of space and matter.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Physics* I(A) 7.

explanation of nature. They are that upon which God works in creating a world. And they both seem to express the character of indefiniteness.”¹⁵¹

In summary, the *Timaeus* reveals the full range of Plato’s ontology. The Demiurge combines and separates Limit and the Unlimited to generate the three Great Kinds: Being, Same, and Difference. By mixing Limit and the Unlimited in different proportions, the Indivisible and Divisible forms of the Kinds are generated. These are then mixed together to generate the Intermediate forms which in turn generates the World Soul, the basis of all things in the universe. So at the highest level, the level on which the Forms come to be, relationality is revealed to be ontologically foundational insofar as it is the relation of Limit and the Unlimited which grounds all reality. Further, the Unlimited, as the Receptacle, makes its appearance on the lower level, the level on which the particulars are generated, appearing here as Motion (both the pre-cosmic “disorderly motion” and the agitation of the Receptacle itself which gives particulars their Space, i.e., the place in which particulars receive their determination). The Receptacle performs the function of the Indefinite Dyad by being the indefinite substrate, Matter, upon which the particulars become particular, defined, determinate. So the role of both the One/Limit and the Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited (as Matter for both the Forms and particulars) is demonstrated. Thus, relationality, as the relation of the One/Good/Limit and Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited, forms the basis of Plato’s ontology on all levels of being.

CONCLUSION

As was stated at the beginning of this section, Plato can be seen as a middle position between a relational ontology arising from Heraclitus and a static substantial ontology arising Parmenides. It is now clear that all Being, that is, the Forms, is relational, insofar as Forms are a relation of the One/Limit and Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited, and additionally, all phenomena, all in the realm of appearance, that is, all particulars, are relational insofar

¹⁵¹ Demos, “The Fundamental Conceptions of Plato’s Metaphysics,” 566. If we understand “the form ‘in relation’” as the Dyad/Unlimited and “the form ‘in itself’” as the One (neither of which seems controversial since we have already seen the Dyad to be relational when Plato calls it More/Less, Great/Small, etc., in the *Philebus*, and the One as “in itself” seems clear) then Dombrowski also notes this more generally, when he states, “Being participates in *both* the form ‘in relation’ and the form ‘in itself’” (emphasis in the original). (Dombrowski, Daniel A., *A Platonic Philosophy of Religion: A Process Perspective* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 38.)

as they are a relation of the Forms and Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited. But if this is all Plato is saying, then he has not presented a true relational ontology, one that is grounded on a pure relationality; rather, he is simply presenting a πρὸς τι ontology in which relation consists of a relation between two elements or relata, namely the One and the Indefinite Dyad. For a true relational ontology, the First Principles themselves must be an indefinite unity which is itself relation. It must be grounded on a Relation that is prior to all relata.

Does Plato present such a conception? To do so the Good/One/Limit must be distinct from and united to the Indefinite Dyad/Matter/Unlimited. At the end of the section on the *Philebus*, this is precisely the conclusion that was reached. Further, the inherent unity of the Indefinite Dyad was clearly indicated at *Philebus* 24e7–25a1: “Whatever seems to us to become ‘more and less’, or susceptible to ‘strong and mild’ or to ‘too much’ and all of that kind, all that we ought to subsume under *the genus of the unlimited as its unity*” (emphasis added). But the distinct nature of these two principles seems to be clear as well. Alexander, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* 987b 33, states, “The Dyad comes first after the One, containing both the Much and the Little in itself. For the Double is much, and the Half little, and both are contained in the Dyad. And *the Dyad is opposed to the One, being divided, whereas the One is undivided*”¹⁵² (emphasis added). So in some sense, the Dyad is in opposition to the One.

In what manner is the Dyad in opposition to the One? It is in the sense that the One belongs to Being while the Dyad belongs to non-Being. In the *Sophist*, the purpose of the discussion of Being and Difference is to discover the nature of non-Being. As Plato has Theaetetus say, “Obviously *that which is not*—which we were looking for because of the sophist—is just exactly this [i.e., Difference]”¹⁵³ (emphasis in the translation). But clearly this is not strictly non-Being. The whole reason for the discussion is to understand how to speak about non-Being if non-Being is literally nothing, as Parmenides showed. But what this does reveal is the nature of the opposition between the One and the Dyad. If the One/Good is, as Plato asserts in *The Republic*, beyond Being, then the Dyad, as its opposite, would seem to be below Being. This must be the case if the Dyad is a principle of Being. It cannot be an aspect of Being, that is, it cannot be difference in the realm of things that are, if it is a principle which

¹⁵² Alexander, Commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, 56.10–13.

¹⁵³ 258b6–7.

constitutes the very nature of things that are. It must be ontologically prior to things that are, and as such, since the One is beyond Being, it is relegated to a region below Being. Thus, it is a nothingness, but not an absolute nothingness. It is an otherness, but in its primordial state, it is an otherness to that which is beyond Being, that is, the One.

However, this implies a distinction, a determinateness which cannot hold. In the realm of the beyond/below Being, there is no distinction, no determinateness. For there to be distinctness/determinateness, there would necessarily be twoness. But twoness does not come to be until the One is imposed on the Dyad. Alexander again notes this, “When given definition by the One, the Indefinite Dyad became the Numerical Dyad. This Dyad was a single Eidos, and the first of the Numbers.”¹⁵⁴ Since determinateness, or twoness, is ontologically posterior to the One and the Dyad, these principles cannot be numerically distinct. In other words, they cannot be determinate. This means there must be some relation between them. In noting the influence of Pythagorean thought upon Plato’s ontology, Horky, interpreting Philolaus, states, “Nowhere in the extant fragments does Philolaus explicitly say that the ‘one’ or any number is ontologically prior to all things. He says, instead, that the ‘limiters’ and ‘unlimiteds,’ as principles, preexisted (ὕπαρχον), but, given the fact that they were fundamentally different, it was necessary for harmony to supervene in order for them to achieve a proper ordering.”¹⁵⁵ Philolaus, in the same fragment, goes on to state, “since the sources were not alike nor of the same kind, it was impossible for them to be organized unless a harmony came upon them, in whatever way it did. Now things that were alike and of the same kind had no need of harmony, but things that were unlike and of a different kind and rank, these had to be combined by harmony, if

¹⁵⁴ Alexander, Commentary on Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, 56.20–22.

¹⁵⁵ Horky, *Plato and Pythagoreanism*, 185. The fragment of Philolaus states: “Concerning nature and harmony, this is how it is: the essence of things, being eternal, and nature itself admit of divine but not human knowledge; except that it is not possible that any of the things that exist and are known by us could have come to be unless the essences of things, from which the world-order is composed, existed—namely limiters and unlimiteds. And since the sources were not alike nor of the same kind, it was impossible for them to be organized unless a harmony came upon them, in whatever way it did. Now things that were alike and of the same kind had no need of harmony, but things that were unlike and of a different kind and rank, these had to be combined by harmony, if they were to be held fast in an arrangement.” (As translated in Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*, 1, 493.)

they were to be held fast in an arrangement.”¹⁵⁶ If Horky is correct in his connection of Philolaus’ thought with Plato’s, what this indicates is two-fold: the One and Dyad as preexistent principles (1) must be related and (2) must be different.¹⁵⁷ This cannot, however, be a relation between two relata, since this would require the relata to be determinate, and determinateness does not yet exist on the level of the principles. How is it possible to have a relation between two non-distinct things? The answer is that these principles must be indistinct and yet distinct. Plato’s First Principles must be an indistinct First Principle that contains both the One and the Dyad undifferentiated and yet distinct. The First Principle must be a pure relation that exists ontologically prior to any determination which could give rise to relata that could possibly ground and define a relation.

It is almost certain that Plato does not see the implications of his ontology; nevertheless, the implications are necessary given that the One/Good/Limit and Indefinite Dyad/Unlimited are outside the confines of Being and determinateness. Being and determinateness are, in fact, a result of the relation of the One and Indefinite Dyad. Because he is bound by a *πρός τι* conception of relation, as well as by the Parmenidean understanding of Being as independent self-subsistence, he cannot grasp an ontological principle that is Pure Relationality; a principle that is neither One nor Many, although as noted earlier, in the *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, Plato reaches this precise conclusion. Thus, by recognizing the realm of phenomena as being grounded by a relation of Limit and the Unlimited, Plato embraces a Heraclitean ontology of relationality. However, it is not simply by recognizing the relational aspect of phenomena that Plato incorporates Heraclitean relationality. The Indefinite Dyad, understood as indefinite, a tension between opposites (e.g., Hot/Cold, Strong/Weak, Great/Small), reflects a Heraclitean understanding on a primordial ontological level. At the same time, Limit, understood as One, unmoving and therefore static (insofar as it is tied to Rest), reflects a Parmenidean understanding of Being. Even though his ontology entails that Limit and the Unlimited be an undifferentiated First Principle, which is ultimately indefinite and relational, he gives a primacy in his understanding to the One/Good/Limit,

¹⁵⁶ Again, as translated by Graham.

¹⁵⁷ In truth, regardless of whether Horky is correct, Philolaus’ claims are true notwithstanding. For two distinct things to come together, harmony must be imposed upon them. This, as we have seen, is what the Demiurge does. Also, we have seen in Plato himself that Limit and the Unlimited are preexistent principles. They exist prior to all existing things and form their basis.

and by making this his primary First Principle and defining it as *Limit*, he facilitates the turn down the path of an Aristotelian substance ontology.

So to conclude, while Plato is a synthesis of both the relational ontology of Heraclitus and the substantial ontology of Parmenides, by consciously committing himself to a fundamental understanding of the First Principle as Limit (even while necessarily, albeit unconsciously, giving the Unlimited equal status as a First Principle), Plato's ontology becomes a temporary synthesis that diverges back into the Heraclitean and Parmenidean ontologies. The substance ontology of Parmenides comes down through Aristotle, developing into the dominant ontological understanding, and reaching its crisis in Descartes, while the relational ontology is further developed in the ontological understanding of the Neoplatonists.



The Neoplatonists: The Path of Relation

PLOTINUS AND THE ONE

Unlike Plato, for whom Intellect/Reason and the First Principle are identified, for Plotinus Intellect falls after the First Principle as the first emanation from the First Principle.¹ The reason for this is that for Plotinus intellect entails multiplicity, and he understands the First Principle to be fully One. As was seen, for Plato the First Principle involves multiplicity, but it is an indefinite multiplicity that lacks determination, and so the multiplicity remains unified in an indefinite manner. In a certain sense, therefore, the First Principle can still be said to be one. For Plotinus, however, the multiplicity that arises with Intellect is determinate, and so Being, that is, determinate being, arises with Intellect within the same emanation. Nevertheless, Plotinus' One, as he clearly states, is not simply one, and he even states that it is inappropriate to call it "one". Ultimately, Plotinus' One is best understood as Pure Relation.

For any philosophical system in which the principle of reality is supremely transcendent, rational comprehension of this principle is going to be problematic. This is certainly true of the Plotinian "One". Plotinus recognizes the difficulty: "How then do we ourselves speak about it [the One]? We do indeed say something about it, but we certainly do not speak

¹What follows on Plotinus has been adapted from Filler, "Relationality as the Ground of Being: The One as Pure Relation in Plotinus".

it, and we have neither knowledge or thought of it. But if we do not have it in knowledge, do we not have it at all? But we have it in such a way that we speak about it, but do not speak it. For we say what it is not, but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it”² (V.3.14.1–8). In fact, as Plotinus notes, it is not truly appropriate to call it “one”, but we do so by necessity. “Whatever is even before these, we give the name of ‘One’ to by necessity, to indicate its nature to one another, bringing ourselves by the name to an indivisible idea and wanting to unify our souls” (VI.9.5.39–42).

If this is the case, and we can only say what it is not, even to the extent that the name “One” is ultimately inappropriate, then what can Plotinus mean by calling his first principle “the One”? O’Meara suggests, “In speaking about the One, we are speaking, not of it, but of our own nature and experiences.”³ If this is correct, then it is because our own nature and our experience of our own nature is primarily one of unity that we call it “One”. While it is certainly true that for Plotinus, to be is to be one (VI.9.1.1–3), it is also the case that Being entails multiplicity (V.1.4.26–41).⁴ Thus, to say that my nature, and my experience of it, is primarily one of unity seems no more true than to say that it is one of diversity. Since for Plotinus everything that follows after the One is a mixture of unity and multiplicity, this conclusion seems difficult to escape. Rather than understand Plotinus’ first principle as absolute unity, we should re-examine the nature of the First Principle itself. The resulting conclusion will be that the First Principle of Being is best understood as Pure Relationality.

As has already been seen, Plotinus recognizes that it is, in some sense, inappropriate to call the First Principle “One”. Plotinus adds,

But perhaps this name “One” contains [only] a denial of multiplicity. This is why the Pythagoreans symbolically indicated it to each other by the name of Apollo, in negation of the multiple. if the One—name and reality expressed—was to be taken positively it would be less clear than if we did not give it a name at all: for perhaps this name [One] was given it in order that the seeker, beginning from this which is completely indicative of simplicity, may finally negate this as well. (V.5.6.26–35)

² Unless otherwise noted, all English translations are from Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, 7 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

³ O’Meara, Dominic J., *Plotinus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 57.

⁴ These passages will be quoted below.

And, “there must therefore be a concentration into a real one outside all multiplicity and any simplicity whatsoever (ἀπλότητος ἡστινοσοῦν), if it is to be really simple” (V.3.16.14–16).⁵ This is more than just a recognition of linguistic inadequacy; it is the recognition of something essential about the nature of the Plotinian First Principle.

How, then, is the One to be understood if its simplicity resides in the negation of “any simplicity whatsoever”, and why call it “One” at all? To be is to be one. As Plotinus says, “It is by the one that all beings are beings, both those which are primarily beings and those which are in any sense said to be among beings. For what could anything be if it was not one?” (VI.9.1.1–3).⁶ But to be is also to be determinate, “Being must not fluctuate, so to speak, in the indefinite, but must be fixed by limit and stability; and stability in the intelligible world is limitation and shape, and it is by these that it receives existence” (V.1.7.24–27). Thus, to be is to be one and determinate. But to be determinate is to be other than some thing, and since to be simple is to be other than that which is complex, to be one is also to be determinate.⁷

But determination also entails multiplicity. As we discovered in both the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*, one entails many and many entails one, so when Plotinus asserts that to be is to be determinate, this also entails that to be is to be multiple.

But each of them [all things] is Intellect and Being, and the whole is universal Intellect and Being, Intellect making Being exist in thinking it, and Being giving Intellect thinking and existence by being thought. But the cause of thinking is something else, which is also cause of being; they both therefore have a cause other than themselves. For they are simultaneous and exist

⁵I follow Perl’s emended translation here. I believe he is correct in asserting that Armstrong’s translation does not adequately capture the force of the Greek. (Perl, Eric D., “‘The Power of All Things’: The One as Pure Giving”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (1997): 305 n.20.)

⁶It must be noted that this also entails that all things that exist only exist in their relation to the One, so relationality is the ontological ground for all levels of reality. This is not surprising if, as I am arguing, the One Pure Relation, since in any Neoplatonic system, all beings must reflect or image the nature of the First Principle.

⁷Thus, Perl says, “Thus it is not accurate even to say, as is often done, that the One is simple; for if it were simple, it would participate in simplicity itself, and thus have a determination and not be supreme. Indeed, paradoxically, if it were simple, it would be complex; for it would possess the attribute of simplicity, and to possess an attribute is to be complex.” (Perl, “‘The Power of All Things’: The One as Pure Giving”, 305.)

together and one does not abandon the other, but this one is two things, Intellect and Being and thinking and thought, Intellect as thinking and Being as thought. For there could not be thinking without otherness, and also sameness. These then are primary, Intellect, Being, Otherness, Sameness; but one must also include Motion and Rest. One must include movement if there is thought, and rest that it may think the same; and otherness, that there may be thinker and thought; or else, if you take away otherness, it will become one and keep silent; and the objects of thought, also, must have otherness in relation to each other. But one must include sameness, because it is one with itself, and all have some common unity; and the distinctive quality of each is otherness. (V.1.4.26–41)

Thus, since to be other entails multiplicity, that is, something from which a thing is other, to be is to be both one and many. At V.4.1.20–21, Plotinus even refers to Intellect/Being as a “one-many”.⁸ So when Plotinus asserts in V.5.6 that in order to grasp the One we need to negate simplicity, and earlier, in the same passage, he states, “perhaps this name ‘One’ contains [only] a denial of multiplicity”, this means that the One, as First Principle, is indeterminate/indefinite. Plotinus affirms this explicitly, “the One must be without form. But if it is without form it is not a substance; for a substance must be some one particular thing, something, that is, defined and limited” (V.5.6.5–7), and “it would be absurd to seek to comprehend that [the One’s] boundless nature (ἄπλετον φύσιν)” (V.5.6.15–16). So it is not just a linguistic contrivance when Plotinus says it is inappropriate to call his First Principle “The One”; rather it is a significant metaphysical claim. Since unity entails determination, that is, Being, which also entails multiplicity, the First Principle ultimately cannot be one.⁹ So if the negation of the One’s simplicity entails indeterminateness, and it is called “The One” to draw us to this negation, the answer to our earlier questions, “How are we to understand the One if we must negate simplicity?” and “Why call it One?”, turns out to be the same: to draw us to the indefinite nature of the First Principle.¹⁰

⁸ “If then there is something else [Intellect/Being] after the First [the One], it cannot still be simple: it will therefore be a One-Many.”

⁹ We have already seen that something absolutely determinate and independent cannot exist alone by itself (Chap. 1, section “The Problem”).

¹⁰ It should also be remembered from what was said above that Plotinus states that the purpose of calling it “One” is to bring “ourselves by the name to an indivisible idea” (VI.9.5.39–42).

So the nature of the One is indefinite, and the nature of Pure Relation is indefinite, does this entail that Plotinus' "One" is Pure Relation? Plotinus does examine the nature of relation in some detail. In VI.1.6–7, Plotinus says, "It is particularly important when dealing with this category [relation] to ask whether this state of being related has any substantial existence,... or whether it is so in some cases,... or whether it is nowhere so" (VI.1.6.2–7). In other words, "Does 'relation' have its own existence?" He goes on:

If then we are not saying anything, but our statements are deceptive, none of these [relations] would exist and 'the state of being related' would be an empty phrase; but if we speak the truth... and if in the case of all things which we say are related the state of being related to each other is subsequent to the subjects related, but we observe it as presently existent, and our knowledge is directed to the object being known-at this point the substantiality arising out of the state of relation is even more obvious-we should stop enquiring whether the state of relation exists. (VI.1.7.1–3, 11–16)

Two things are significant here. First, Plotinus is still bound by the Aristotelian conception of relation in which "the state of being related to each other is subsequent to the subjects related", that is, relation is grounded in the relata. This recognition entails, it must be admitted, that to suggest that Plotinus himself understands his First Principle as Pure Relation would be wrong. Since the state of being related is subsequent to the things related for Plotinus, as the quote above shows, he remains too grounded in the Aristotelian categories to make this leap. But the nature of Plotinus' One and the manner in which he describes it, as will be shown, entails understanding the One as Pure Relation, once the true ontological status of Pure Relation (as ground of all determination) is properly understood. The second significant point is that Plotinus recognizes that the state of relation does, in fact, have its own existence.

What kind of existence does relation have? He states, "If then one is going to consider the state belonging to relation generically as a form (εἶδος), it will be one genus and substantial reality, as there is a rational forming principle in all cases; but if the rational principles are both opposed and have the differences which have been stated, perhaps there would not be one genus, but all relatives are brought back to a certain likeness and a single category" (VI.1.9.26–31). In other words, if we take the state of being in a relation (τὴν τοῦ πρὸς τι σχέσιν) generally, then it is a single kind

with a single substance (ὑπόστασις); if, however, we take the specific types of relations, for example, smaller and larger, double and half, even though they may be intimately related, some of these relations are opposed and so cannot be brought together under a single genus; rather, they are united by a “certain likeness or category”. Thus, we can see that *qua* relation, relation has a single kind of existence which falls under a single rational principle (λόγος). This, for Plotinus, places it squarely in the realm of Intellect/Being, and below the First Principle, and so in the realm of the one-many. This is to be expected since Plotinus earlier states, “What then would there be aside from these things which are related to each other except ourselves making intelligible their juxtaposition?” (VI.1.6.29–30).¹¹ So it seems that while relation has a formal unity, as do all things which exist, it cannot simply be identified with the One.

But the question is more complex. Relation cannot be something that derives its existence subsequent to Intellect, since the essential nature of Intellect itself is relation. While all things are related to the One for Plotinus, Intellect has a special relation to the One insofar as the relation itself constitutes what Intellect is. “This, we may say, is the first act of generation: the One, perfect because it seeks nothing, has nothing, and needs nothing, overflows, as it were, and its superabundance makes something other than itself. This, when it has come into being, turns back upon the One and is filled, and becomes Intellect by looking towards it” (V.2.1.7–12). And,

But it was not yet Intellect when it looked at him, but looked unintellectually. Or rather we should say that it did not ever see the Good, but lived towards it and depended on it and turned to it, and its movement was fulfilled because it moved there and round that Good and filled Intellect, and was not just movement but movement satiated and full; and thereupon it became all things, and knew this in its own intimate self-consciousness and was now at this point Intellect...Its principle was that which it was before that being filled, but another principle, in a way external to it, was the one that filled it, from which it received its character in being filled. (VI.7.16.14–21, 33–36)

¹¹ My translation.

This “looking at” and “turning towards” clearly indicates a relational disposition toward the One which constitutes the nature of Intellect.¹² This relational existence is not only directed toward the One, it is “internal” as well. As we already saw in V.1.4, “Intellect mak[es] Being exist in thinking it, and Being giv[es] Intellect thinking and existence by being thought.” So relation is not merely an incidental aspect of Intellect/Being, it is its essential nature. But if the nature of Intellect/Being is relation, then how can the existence of relation *qua* relation only come into being on the level of the Intellect? This would not be a problem if it were only on its own level, that is, between Being and Intellect, that relationality constitutes the being of each, but this is explicitly not the case. One might argue that since all things ultimately derive from the One, it is reasonable to see relation immediately following from the productive activity of the One, thus on an ontological level between the One and Intellect. But the being of relation *simpliciter* falls under the domain of Intellect/Being, as we saw above; therefore this option is not open.¹³ If, then, relation *qua* relation derives its existence from Intellect and is subsequent to Intellect, which seems necessary if it is subsequent to the things related, then how can Intellect’s essential nature be relational? It seems that relation must exist on a higher level. Further, this follows if we understand that Sameness and Otherness are generated along with Intellect/Being. Same and Other are relational terms, but they are opposite relational terms. Their fundamental unity must, therefore, come from a higher level for Plotinus.¹⁴ If

¹²I am following Bussanich and Emilsson here contra Lloyd in claiming the One is the generator of Intellect/Being. I find it difficult to argue against passages where Plotinus explicitly states this to be the case, e.g., V.4.2.1–3 “If, then, the generator itself is Intellect, what is generated by it must be more defective than Intellect, but fairly close to it and like it; but since the generator is beyond Intellect, it is necessary that what be generated should be Intellect.” For the particular arguments see Bussanich, John, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); Emilsson, Eyjolfur, *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Lloyd, A. C., “Plotinus on the Genesis of Thought and Existence”, in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, ed. Julia Annas (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

¹³To understand “relation” as Form does not help either. For Plotinus, Forms are a part of Intellect. “Intellect as a whole is all the Forms, and each individual Form is an individual intellect, as the whole body of knowledge is all its theorems, but each theorem is a part of the whole” (V.9.84–6). See Gurtler, Gary M., *Plotinus: The Experience of Unity* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1988), 12ff., for an interesting discussion of the significance of this passage.

¹⁴We saw this earlier in VI.1.9, when Plotinus said that relations in which the rational principle are opposed can only share a “certain likeness or category”.

their unity is relationality, which it seems to be, then their principle must be relational. Given this, to say that the One is Pure Relation seems well justified, even though, as noted above, Plotinus is too grounded in the Aristotelian understanding of “relation” to consciously recognize this. Nevertheless, Plotinus himself says something close to this in VI.8.17.25–27: “He himself [The One] therefore is by himself what he is, related and directed to himself, that he may not in this way either be related to the outside or to something else, but altogether self-related.” If this cannot be a self-relation of whole to parts of the kind noted earlier (since being simple the One cannot have parts),¹⁵ then the only way to coherently understand this “self-relation” of the One is as a Pure Relation independent of and ontologically prior to any relata. Other passages indicate the self-relatedness of the One as well. “And he, that same self, is lovable and love and love of himself, in that he is beautiful only from himself and in himself. For surely his keeping company with himself could not be in any other way than if what keeps company and what it keeps company with were the one and the same” (VI.8.15.1–8). And,

he [the One] is, if we may say so, borne to his own interior, as it were well pleased with himself, the ‘pure radiance’, being himself this with which he is well pleased: but this means that he gives himself existence, supposing him to be an abiding active actuality and the most pleasing of things in a way rather like Intellect. But Intellect is an actualisation; so that he is an actualisation. But not of anything else; he is then an actualisation of himself. He is not therefore as he happens to be, but as he acts. And then, further, if he is supremely because he so to speak holds to himself and so to speak looks to himself, and this so-called being of his is his looking to himself, he as it were makes himself and is not as he chanced to be but as he wills, and his willing is not random nor as it happened; for since it is willing of the best it is not random. But that an inclination of this kind to himself, being in a kind of way his activity and abiding in himself, makes him be what he is, is evident if one posits the opposite; because, if he inclined to what is outside him, he would put an end to his being what he is; so then his being what he is is his self-directed activity; but these are one thing and himself. (VI.8.16.13–29)

¹⁵ See Chap. 1, section “The Problem”.

And particularly, “Now nothing else is present to it [the One], but it will have a simple concentration of attention on itself” (VI.7.39.1–2).¹⁶ In this latter passage, this “simple concentration of attention on itself” both is and is not the One, and in this “simple concentration of attention on itself” Intellect is generated. So on the one hand the One in its “simple concentration of attention on itself” generates Intellect, but on the other hand, this “concentration” is not the One.¹⁷ Bussanich calls this paradoxical and complex and suggests understanding it “as absolute or infinite consciousness without an object, a *non-relational* awareness that lacks intentionality and compositeness”.¹⁸ However, these passages are better understood to indicate the pure relationality of the First Principle apart from any relata, and it is only the difficulty in grasping relation apart from relata that creates the paradox and complexity. This should become clearer when the Indeterminate Dyad is discussed below.

So if Plotinus’ First Principle is understood as Pure Relation, then in what way is it a principle of unity? This can be understood in two ways. On the level of Intellect/Being, the emanation out from the One generates multiplicity, but the essential nature of Intellect/Being is relational. It is this very relationality which unifies Intellect/Being into a unity. It is what makes them One, or a *one*-many. Without relation, multiplicity cannot hold together; there cannot be a whole. Relationality, by its very nature, is unifying. Further, on the level of determinate beings, it was already seen that a single independently existing entity, a unit, cannot be unless it is related to something else.¹⁹ To be determinate is to be relational. As noted in V.1.4, Intellect, Being, Otherness, and Sameness are fundamental for Plotinus. Sameness and Otherness come into being with Intellect and Being. Thus, “the proper objects of thought must be the same and other in relation to the intellect. And yet again, each of the things which are

¹⁶ A more literal translation of the second half of the passage would be “...but it will be a simple throwing toward itself by itself. (ἀλλ’ ἀπλῆ τις ἐπιβολὴ αὐτῷ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔσται.)”

¹⁷ The full context of this passage is as follows: “But if the Good is sufficient to itself before the thought, since it is sufficient to itself for good it will have no need of the thought about it; so, as good, it does not think itself. But as what, then? Now nothing else is present to it, but it will have a simple concentration of attention on itself. But since there is no distance or difference in regard to itself, what could its attention be other than itself?” VI.7.38.23–39.4.

¹⁸ Bussanich, John, “Plotinus’s Metaphysics of the One”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 62 (emphasis added).

¹⁹ Again, see the discussion in Chap. 1, section “The Problem”.

being thought brings out along with itself sameness and otherness" (V.3.10.26–28). Thus we see that all things come to be both as the same and as other. But this is precisely what it is to be determinate, that is, limited. In itself, as a whole, a unity, the entity partakes of sameness, and yet in this very determinateness, it is other than other determinate things. Since the One generates determination, it is the principle of the unity of all things, but this entails that it is the principle of multiplicity as well.²⁰ Thus, Plotinus says, "But how is that One the principle of all things? Is it because as principle it keeps them in being, making each one of them exist? Yes, and because it brought them into existence" (V.3.15.27–29). So we can see that it is the principle of unity because relation by its very nature unites and, further, precisely because it is the principle of determination. So just as Relation is necessary for and establishes the independent, that is, determinate, existence of an entity, so also does Plotinus' First Principle. This also answers the question: Why is it better to understand the First Principle as Relation rather than as One? It is relationality which unifies. We have already seen that a One, a simple unity, cannot unify; rather it differentiates insofar as it is a determinate one. Relation, on the other hand, unifies. Without relationality, there is only the disparate, determinate, unconnected, and therefore disunified (although in itself the same). It is only relationality which unites the disparate, same in itself, different, into a unity. In other words, things are only unified by relation; thus only Relation can truly be a principle of unity.

Finally, given this understanding of Plotinus' First Principle, how does it, as indefinite and as the ground of Being, generate determinate particulars? Plotinus is explicit that the One does not generate out of need. It is not because it lacks anything that it produces. As seen in V.2.1, the One in its perfection overflows, generates. And, according to Plotinus, it is this very perfection which necessitates that it generate: "And all things when they come to perfection produce; the One is always perfect and therefore produces everlastingly; and its product is less than itself" (V.1.6.38–40). The language of *overflowing* and *superabundance* is problematic. It seems to indicate that there is a limit to the One which it overcomes when it produces. But the limit should not be seen as in the One, but rather in that which is produced. As was seen in V.2.1 and VI.7.16 mentioned earlier, the generation of Intellect is called a "filling" and this filling is

²⁰ As Perl notes, "The One, therefore, establishes being not only by unifying it but equally by differentiating it, and indeed is the source of being because it is the principle of difference no less than of identity." (Perl, "The Power of All Things": The One as Pure Giving", 301.)

accomplished by a “turning back” (ἐπιστροφή). It is precisely this “turning back” or “looking” which creates limit. “When its [Intellect’s] life was looking towards that [The One] it was unlimited, but after it had looked there it was limited, though that Good has no limit. For immediately by looking to something which is one the life is limited by it, and has in itself limit and bound and form” (VI.7.17.14–17).

How are we to understand this “turning”? Plotinus certainly does not help the matter. Some passages, for example, V.1.7.4–6, “But that [i.e., the Good] is not Intellect. How then does it generate Intellect? Because by its return to it it sees: and this seeing is Intellect,”²¹ and V.2.1.7–12 (cited earlier), seem to speak of Intellect itself turning back to the One. Others, for example, VI.7.39.1–2 and VI.7.16 (cited earlier), seem to indicate the One turns back on itself.²² Beierwaltes, in his interpretation of V.1.7.4–6, explains it best:

This passage suggests the idea, that Intellect is generated through this, that the One reflects on itself. Since the One, however, is relation-less in itself and therefore is not able to think itself, the generation of Intellect is only to be understood thus, that the One in turning back on itself stayed itself and became other: the One reflecting itself in multiplicity, Intellect. “The turning back of the One to itself” can only take place in the act of its emanation into multiplicity and in this multiplicity’s reflection. Hence, Intellect would be the self-reflection of the One in multiplicity, which is self-constituted through this self-reflection: the reflection of *the One* in *the Other*. (emphasis in original)²³

How are we to understand the “reflection of the One in the Other”? The turning back is simultaneously a turning back of the One, but since it constitutes Intellect, it is also the turning back of Intellect.²⁴

²¹ Translation emended according to Perl’s translation. (Perl, Eric D., *Plotinus Ennead V.1: On the Three Primary Levels of Reality. Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2015), 42.)

²² See for a discussion of VI.7.39.1–2.

²³ Beierwaltes, Werner, *Plotin Über Ewigkeit und Zeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1995), 14–15, my translation. I recognize the controversial nature of this passage (V.1.7.4–6). Bussanich discusses the passage and controversy at length in Bussanich, *The One and Its Relation to Intellect in Plotinus*, 37–43.

²⁴ Bussanich, in his discussion of VI.8.16.19–21, also states explicitly, “The one does see itself,” contra Rist. (Bussanich, John, “Plotinus on the Inner Life of the One”, *Ancient Philosophy* VII (1987): 180.) But this statement is made in the context of the soul’s mystical union with the One.

How does this work if the First Principle is understood as relation? Plotinus himself helps us see the answer. In V.3.11.11–13, he says, “[Intellect] became a seeing sight. It is already Intellect when it possesses this, and it possesses it as Intellect; but before this it is only desire (ἔφεσις μόνον) and unformed sight. So this Intellect threw itself to the One (ἐπέβαλε μὲν ἐκείνῳ), but by grasping it became Intellect”.²⁵ What is to be understood from this? The phrase “ἔφεσις μόνον” literally means “throwing only”, so the passage could be read “before this it is only a throwing and unformed sight”, but it is helpful to keep both images, throwing and desire, in mind. Thus, it would be the One that desires/throws itself.²⁶ Since this desire cannot be a desire for something other, it is a self-reflective desire that throws itself upon itself, generating determinate being. As relation then, it can be seen that Relation, as desiring to be related, that is, desiring to be itself, turns to itself and, in doing so, generates determinate being, that is, relata. In its moving out in relation (Plotinus’ radiation of the One) it turns and produces entities. Since this is what the First Principle is and not some activity which springs from its being, it is clear, as Perl notes, “The One... is not a being which acts, but rather is productive activity, and hence, once again, is not a thing which produces, but the very production of being.”²⁷ The One is the principle of Being and unity, and in the same way Relation is the principle of Being and unity.

But another question needs to be asked here: What precisely is the ontological state of this “prior to seeing”? Emilsson discusses the activity of the One in terms of an “external activity” as opposed to an “internal activity”.²⁸ This is problematic since even if this is merely metaphorical language, it implies a limited and determinate “One” (since it has an inside and an outside) and contradicts passages such as V.5.9.7–11 (“But the Principle, since it has nothing before it, has not anything else to be in; but since it has nothing else to be in, and the other things are in those which come before them, it encompasses all the other things. But in encompassing them it is not dispersed into them and it possesses them without being possessed”) which explicitly deny the possibility of anything external to the One. Bussanich discusses stages of the development of Intellect,

²⁵ Translation emended.

²⁶ This obviously cannot be desire as commonly understood since, as Plato points out in *The Symposium*, this entails a lack, and the One can have no lack (as we saw in V.2.1 cited earlier).

²⁷ Perl, “‘The Power of All Things’: The One as Pure Giving”, 307.

²⁸ Emilsson, *Plotinus on Intellect*, Ch. 1 passim.

trying, it seems, to resolve the difficulties in Plotinus' statements about the generation of Intellect through a "turning back" or "looking back".²⁹ To avoid the difficulty of having levels in between Intellect and the One, he claims they are logical, not temporal, stages. This does not resolve the problem, however. The priority of the One over the Intellect is already a logical (or ontological), not temporal, priority. If the stages are to be understood as an ontological process which is atemporal, then they are interposed ontological realities in between Intellect and The One. If the intellect is supposed to be the "next after" the One, as Plotinus clearly states, then these stages either (1) cannot exist or (2) exist completely within the Intellect, in which case they resolve no difficulty.³⁰

As Perl notes, the interpretation of V.1.7.5–6 is controversial. He asks, "Does it mean that the One returns toward and sees itself, and that the One's self-seeing is intellect? Or that intellect returns toward and sees the One, and that this seeing is intellect?"³¹ Perl cites V.1.6.18³² and VI.7.39.1–2 and VI.7.16.14–21, 33–36, were cited earlier as passages in which the One is described as turned to itself. Rist, in his discussion of the Indefinite Dyad and Intelligible Matter, notes the self-contemplation of the One saying, "We may take it for granted that the One, in its superabundance and from its self-contemplation, displays the chief characteristic of perfection as seen by Plotinus, namely creativity."³³ It is precisely this self-relation as self-contemplation which, as Rist notes, constitutes the One's generative characteristic. Perl argues that the problem with understanding V.1.7.4–6 as asserting that the One "turns to itself" is that it

²⁹ Bussanich, "Plotinus's Metaphysics of the One", 50–51.

³⁰ Discussion of "pre-Intellect" or "inchoate Intellect" runs into the same problem, as I see it: it interposes some ontological reality between the One and Intellect. I will address these difficulties in my discussion of the Indefinite Dyad.

³¹ Perl, *Plotinus Ennead V.1: On the Three Primary Levels of Reality. Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, 138. Armstrong also discusses the controversy and notes that Henry and Schwyzer favor the former reading while Armstrong follows Cilento, Igal, and others who favor the latter (see n. 1 in Plotinus, *Ennead V*, trans. A. H. Armstrong, VII vols., vol. V (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 34).

³² Perl's translation is "if something comes into being posterior to it, it must be generated while that is always turned to itself". (Perl, "The Power of All Things": The One as Pure Giving", 40. And see Perl's comments on V.1.6.18 on p. 138.) Armstrong's translation is "if anything comes into being after it, we must think that it necessarily does so while the One remains continually turned towards itself".

³³ Rist, John, "The Indefinite Dyad and Intelligible Matter in Plotinus", *The Classical Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1962): 99.

imparts motion to the One, which, as he rightly notes, is something Plotinus expressly denies.³⁴ To say that the One turns to itself, however, does not impart motion to the One if understood correctly. Properly understood, the “turning” simply reflects the inherent relationality of the One. The problem is simply that being bound by the Aristotelian notion of relationality as grounded in the relata, Plotinus is unable to conceive of relationality which is ontologically prior to its relata, which is what the One inherently is. To understand this more fully, an examination of the Indeterminate Dyad is in order.

The Indeterminate Dyad plays a critical role in the generation of Intellect. In some sense, it seems to have an intermediate ontological status, metaphysically abiding in between the One and Intellect, but asserting an intermediate ontological stage between the One and Intellect compromises the Intellect as the first offspring of the One, as noted above. Perl addresses this by asserting that the generation of Intellect from the One occurs in two phases. “In the first moment, intellect proceeds from the One in an inchoate or indeterminate state. In the second moment, this ‘turns back’ to the one and receives determination from it, thus becoming actualized as intellect proper....”³⁵ The first moment corresponds to the Indeterminate Dyad.³⁶ Anticipating the problem that this seems to insert an intermediate ontological state between the One and Intellect, Perl states,

...these phases must not be understood sequentially, as if intelligible matter or the dyad actually existed in a pre-intellectual or indeterminate state. As purely indeterminate and potential, this would not actually be anything at all. What comes from the One, in the sense of depending on it, is not the indeterminate dyad *qua* indeterminate, or “divine matter” without determination, but rather intellect or being itself.³⁷

Elsewhere, Perl states, “This theory must not be taken to mean that, according to Plotinus, the indeterminate dyad actually exists prior to

³⁴ Perl, *Plotinus Ennead V.1: On the Three Primary Levels of Reality. Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, 138.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

³⁶ “These two moments correspond respectively to the indeterminate dyad or ‘the matter in intelligibles,’ and the determination in virtue of which it becomes intelligible being...” (*ibid.*).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 116–117.

receiving determination and thus independently of the One.”³⁸ The problem arises from the claim that the Indeterminate Dyad, as indeterminate and potential, is nothing at all while asserting a few lines later that it is “intellect or being itself”. Given that Plotinus refers to this as a “seeing”, it is reasonable to recognize in this process both the potentiality and actuality which Plotinus attributes to the activity of seeing, “since Intellect is a kind of sight, and a sight which is seeing, it will be a potency which has come into act. So there will be a distinction of matter and form in it, but the matter will be [the kind that exists in] the intelligible world...” (III.8.11.1–5). So it seems that the Indeterminate Dyad conforms to the potentiality of seeing which constitutes the potentiality of Intellect. But what is the potentiality of Intellect apart from the actuality of Intellect? Can it be “intellect itself” as Perl asserts? It is certainly not the result of a temporal development in which potentiality comes into being and is followed by its actuality. That both potentiality and actuality come into being simultaneously (or better “together” since that avoids to some degree the appearance of temporal development) must be understood. But this does not mean they are the same. And neither would it help to assert that the potentiality is the multiplicity which comes into being with Intellect, since multiplicity requires determination and as the *Indeterminate* Dyad, this is explicitly excluded. The best way to understand the Indeterminate Dyad is in Beierwaltes’ terms as “the reflection of the One in the Other”. This indicates that as indeterminate, it is not other than the One, and as dyad, it is not the One. That as potential or indeterminate it is one is reflected by Plotinus in the passage which follows III.8.11.1–5 cited earlier, “since actually seeing, too, has doubleness in it, *it was, certainly, one before seeing*. So the one has become two and the two one” (III.8.11.5–8, emphasis added). Thus, as both the One and not the One, how can this be understood? As a relational stage connecting both the One and Intellect, the Indeterminate Dyad is best understood as the inherent relationality, which constitutes the One, prior (ontologically not temporally) to the generation of the Intellect. This ontological priority is necessary if, as seen earlier, what relates two relata is both independent of and ontologically prior to the relata it relates.³⁹ But it is not simply the relationality of the One prior

³⁸ Ibid., 111.

³⁹ Any relation at this level, a level prior to the actualization of Intellect, must be pure relation, since determinateness, which is what relata are, only arises with the actualization of Intellect.

to Intellect, it is the relationality of the One which the Intellect, in turning to and seeing the One, becomes in its actuality, that is, it is the One's relationality which becomes the relationality which is Intellect. The One, in its inherent relationality, reaches or radiates out from itself, it overflows, and in this radiating out the inherent relationality of the One becomes Intellect in its actuality. The Dyad is this reaching or radiating out of the inherent relationality of the One which is Intellect when it, Intellect, sees the One. Thus, it is the inherent relationality of the One which relates Intellect and the One and which becomes the actuality of Intellect. In this way, the Indeterminate Dyad both is and is not the One, and is and is not Intellect. Thus, in its potentiality, it is not yet Intellect because it is not yet multiple, that is, determinate, and as not yet Intellect, it is not yet apart from the One. But as Dyad, it is no longer One and is, in a way, Intellect.⁴⁰ Thus, to understand the Indeterminate Dyad as the inherent relationality of the One which becomes Intellect helps explain and resolve the controversies regarding the passages which indicate that the One turns to itself and generates Intellect.⁴¹

As Plotinus says, "if it is one thing it would not be the absolute One: for 'absolute' comes before 'something'. It is, therefore, truly ineffable: for whatever you say about it, you will always be speaking of a 'something'" (V.3.12.52–13.2). Thus, the First Principle is a One that is not one. It is one in that it is indivisible and has no parts, but it is not one

⁴⁰To argue that the Indeterminate Dyad is the relationality of the One in Plotinus in no way mitigates its Platonic origins as discussed by Rist (see Rist, "The Indefinite Dyad and Intelligible Matter in Plotinus"). See the previous section for my discussion of the Indefinite Dyad in Plato.

⁴¹This may also provide insight into V.1.7.9, which states, "The One is the potential of all things" (my translation) "τὸ ἐν δύνάμει πάντων." Armstrong translates this as "the One is the productive power of all things". And Perl translates it, "the One is the power of all things." Perl asserts that this means the One is "the enabling condition" of all things, by which they are beings (Perl, *Plotinus Ennead V.1: On the Three Primary Levels of Reality. Translation, Introduction, and Commentary*, 144). But δύνάμει is commonly translated as "potential" in contrast to "actuality". This is the case even in Plotinus, as we see in III.8.11.1–5 cited earlier. As such, I would argue, this is better understood as the inherent and indeterminate relationality of the One, which, as we have seen with the Indeterminate Dyad, grounds the determinateness of both Intellect and all determinate beings.

because it is indeterminate. This cannot be a simplicity because simplicity is already other, that is, other than that which is complex, and otherness entails multiplicity. So the One is truly a not-one One; it is absolutely indefinite. And since it has been shown that the indefinite ground of determination is relational, the indefinite principle of determination is best understood as Pure Relation.

THE CHRISTIAN NEOPLATONISTS

The Trinity: A New Relation

In exploring how relationality plays out in the ontological understanding of the Christian Neoplatonists, the focus will be on two thinkers: John Scottus Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa. It is, however, impossible to discuss the Christian Neoplatonists without first examining their distinctive characteristic: the Trinity.⁴²

Philosophically speaking, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is the culmination and ultimate expression of the fundamental relationality which characterizes the Neoplatonic First Principle.⁴³ How to explain multiplicity from a principle that is primordially One is a problem with which all Neoplatonists have had to deal. Plotinus resolved this problem by asserting that the One is not a simple Unity, and this ultimately, albeit

⁴² Given the nature of both the Trinity and this project, an exhaustive discussion of the Trinity is neither possible nor desirable here. But a brief discussion, one sufficient for our purposes, is necessary.

⁴³ We might even be tempted to see Plato's One and Dyad reflected here. Just as the One and Dyad are a Three (i.e., a One and a Two) and, as we have seen, entail an indistinct distinction, that is, they must be united but also separate, so the Trinity entails a Three which is One and inseparable. However, whereas Plato did not recognize this indistinct distinction in his First Principles (it is entailed by the functioning of the One and the Dyad, but remains, seemingly, unrecognized by Plato), in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity this inseparable separateness is explicitly recognized.

implicitly, entailed a primordial relationality.⁴⁴ With the Trinity, Christian Neoplatonists have recourse to a Unity that is explicitly and inherently Multiple. The essential aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity is that God is both one and three, and His being three does not abrogate His unity, and neither does His unity abrogate his threeness. The Liturgy of St. James declares the Trinity to be “unity subsisting in trinity, divided, yet indivisible”.⁴⁵ In *Oration* 23.8, St. Gregory of Nazianzus states it thus: “They [the Persons of the Trinity] are one in their separation and separate

⁴⁴While I have argued that the source of multiplicity arises from an inherently indistinct multiplicity which is a pure relationality within the “One”, Gersh sees it otherwise. Regarding the pagan Neoplatonists, he says, “The Neoplatonists normally attempt to deal with this problem by postulating a secondary principle or a pair of terms after the One, but the exact order and nature of these intermediates varies from one philosopher to the next, and this to some extent reflects the conceptual difficulties which they were experiencing.” (Gersh, Stephen, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 137.) Syrianus expresses the problem thus: “That it is a deep problem how all things have been produced from a Unity which has no duality nor trace of plurality nor otherness within itself is shown by Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, and all the more speculative writers who have examined the matter.” (*Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics* 46.22–25—English translation by Gersh (ibid.).) While this idea that the One is a “pure unity” with no even implicit multiplicity in it and that multiplicity derives from secondary principles following after may be the traditional understanding of the pagan Neoplatonists, even among themselves, I am not alone in arguing that this view is inconsistent. Perl states, “The absolute ontological difference between the First Principle and all that follows it is defined, as we have seen, by participation. This doctrine leaves no place for secondary beings which are not the First and yet do not exist by participation. Beings exist by participation in Being, which itself must therefore not exist by participation. If, as the Neoplatonists argue, whatever is multiple must exist by participation in the One, then a multiplicity of ‘participables’ between the many participants and the One is impossible. That which the derivative beings participate in must be nothing other than the First Principle itself. The theory of participation, in its very nature, does not allow for any intermediaries. What is present in the participating effect must be nothing other than the whole cause itself.” (Perl, Eric D., *Metbexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Yale University, 1991), 59.)

⁴⁵The Divine Liturgy of St. James, *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, 10 vols., vol. 7, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 537. It may seem strange to cite the Liturgy as a source of doctrinal belief, but as Pelikan recognizes in his work on Christian Doctrine, the belief of the Church is expressed in an essential manner in the worship life of the Church: “we shall identify what is ‘believed’ as the form of Christian doctrine present in the modalities of devotion, spirituality, and worship.” (Pelikan, Jaroslav, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, vol. 1, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 4.)

in their conjunction.”⁴⁶ That the Trinity is recognized as divided and yet indivisible, separate yet inseparable, is the distinctive mark of the Christian doctrine of God, and it is this indistinct distinction, this ontological definite indefiniteness, that ultimately reveals the pure ontologically primordial relationality which is the essence of the Trinity.

The idea of the Trinity, as an explicit understanding of the Source of Being, is new with Christianity, and with the introduction of the Trinity, the Church Fathers found a new term for “relation” which they began to use in reference to this First Principle, the Triune God. Until now, as has been noted, the primary term to define relation has been “πρός τι”, “towards something”. Now, however, in discussing the Trinity, a new term for “relation” appears: σχέσις.⁴⁷ St. Gregory Nazianzus states, “Father is not a name either of an essence or of an action, most clever sirs. But it is the name of the Relation (σχέσεως) in which the Father stands to the Son, and the Son to the Father.”⁴⁸ Again, in *Oration 23.8* St. Gregory of Nazianzus asserts that the Persons of the Trinity are “revered no less for their mutual relationship (ἄλληλα σχέσεως) than when they are thought of and taken individually”.⁴⁹ St. Athanasius of Alexandria, in *On the Holy Trinity: Dialogue 1.25*, claims, “[the title] God indicates the nature, and [the title] Father indicates the relation (σχέσιν) to the Son”⁵⁰ Eusebius of Caesarea, “And truly from the name itself the Son reveals the natural relation (φυσικὴν σχέσιν) to the Father.”⁵¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa states, “For it appears that the name of the Father makes manifest not the essence but indicates the relation (σχέσιν) to the Son.”⁵² St. John of Damascus, in *The Orthodox Faith*, makes the point, “But the names ‘Father’ and ‘Son’ and ‘Spirit,’ ‘Uncaused’ and ‘Caused,’ ‘Unbegotten’ and ‘Begotten’ and ‘Proceeding’ are to be taken as applying in a different way, because they

⁴⁶ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Select Orations*, ed. Thomas P. Halton, trans. Martha Vinson, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2003), 137.

⁴⁷ I do not intend to suggest that the word itself is new. It is not. However, it generally meant “state” or “condition” and was rarely used to indicate “relation”. With its adoption by Christian theologians and philosophers in reference to the Trinity, the word and the relationality it denotes take on new dimensions.

⁴⁸ *Oration 29.16* St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Charles Gordon Brown and James Edward Swallow, vol. 7, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 307.

⁴⁹ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Select Orations*, 137.

⁵⁰ My translation

⁵¹ *de ecclesiastica Theologia* (Book I 10.3.4–5)—my translation.

⁵² *Refutation of the Confession of Eunomius* (16.4–6)—my translation.

declare not the essence, but the mutual relationship (ἄλληλα σχέσεως) and manner of existence [of the Persons].”⁵³

This shift in terminology reflects a shift in the understanding of relationality itself as well as in the understanding of the nature of the First Principle. The phrase πρὸς τι indicates a “something” toward which relationality was directed. This, as has previously been noted, entails that there is some *thing* that grounds the relation. However, σχέσις does not entail such a grounding. Other definitions for σχέσις are “state”, “condition”,⁵⁴ “possession”, and “participation”.⁵⁵ The word is derived from the verb ἔχω, which means “to have”, “to hold”, or “to possess”.⁵⁶ What is significant here is the shift away from being directed toward something toward the idea of being in a state or condition. If one looks at “to hold” or “to possess” as the conceptual foundations of σχέσις, then it is clear that relation, in this sense, can now be understood as the ground upon which what is held or possessed is based. It is the condition a thing finds itself in.⁵⁷

⁵³ St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Frederic H. Chase Jr., The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1958), 190. It needs to be noted that while St. John makes a distinction here between the essence of God and the relation of the Persons, it is not a distinction that denies the relationality of the essence of God. He is rather pointing out that the names Father, Son, Uncaused, Caused, and so on which reflect the inherent interrelationality of the Persons (which in turn constitutes the distinct nature of the Persons) do not, in themselves, designate the essence of the Godhead; rather, they designate the distinct “manner of being” of the Persons. As we will see, the relationality of the Persons is the perfection of the pure relationality of the Godhead. They are the necessary interrelationality which is the perfection of God’s pure relationality.

⁵⁴ Liddell, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 1744.

⁵⁵ Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 1357.

⁵⁶ Liddell, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 749.

⁵⁷ Fromm suggests that the concept “to have” or “to possess” is etymologically and conceptually posterior to the concept/word “to be”. He suggests that the concept “to have” develops in connection with notion of private property (Fromm, Erich, *To Have or To Be* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1976), 20). He states, “By being or having... I refer to two fundamental modes of existence, to two different kinds of orientation toward self and the world” (ibid., 21). He then distinguishes the types of orientation to which these terms, that is, “being” and “having”, refer. Regarding “to have” he says, “In the having mode of existence my relationship to the world is one of possessing and owning, one in which I want to make everybody and everything, including myself, my property.” And regarding “to be” he states, “In the being mode of existence, we must identify two forms of being. One is in contrast to *having*..., and means aliveness and authentic relatedness to the world. The other form of being is in contrast to *appearing* and refers to the true nature, the true reality, of a person or a thing in contrast to deceptive appearances as exemplified in the etymology of being” (ibid.) (emphasis in the original). One might gather from this that the concept of having or possessing is ontologically posterior to that of being, especially being understood

in terms of fixed permanent determinate being. This is so since, as he notes earlier, the concept “to have” only arises in conjunction with the concept of private property, and private property must be understood in terms of fixed unchanging determinate “thing” which becomes and remains “mine”. The concern here might be that since we argue that “σχέσις”, which comes from the verb which means “have” or “possess”, reflects an ontologically prior understanding of being in that relation, which is the proper understanding of being, is ontologically prior to any determinate understanding of being, then if Fromm is correct, then our claim that “σχέσις”, which is etymologically derived from “having” or “possessing”, cannot have ontological priority. It must be ontologically posterior to the notion of “having” or “possessing”, and so our thesis is contradicted. This might seem especially troubling since Fromm does argue for a more “dynamic” understanding of being and explicitly rejects a “substance” understanding of being: “The position that being is a permanent, timeless, and unchangeable substance and the opposite of becoming, as expressed by Parmenides, Plato, and the scholastic ‘realists,’ makes sense only on the basis of the idealistic notion that a thought (idea) is the ultimate reality. If the *idea* of love (in Plato’s sense) is more real than the experience of loving, one can say that love as an idea is permanent and unchangeable. But when we start out with the reality of human beings existing, loving, hating, suffering, then there is no being that is not at the same time becoming and changing. Living structures can be only if they become; they can exist only if they change. Change and growth are inherent qualities of the life process” (ibid., 22). This statement is made in support of what he calls the “crucial point” of “the concept of *process, activity, and movement as an element in being*” (ibid.) (emphasis in the original). Fromm here is clearly advocating a “process” understanding of being in contrast to the “substance” understanding. For Fromm this means that things can only exist in the sense of becoming or change. This would seem to entail that our claim that “σχέσις” reflects an understanding of relation as ontologically primordial is logically untenable, since “σχέσις” is derived from “to have/possess” which only arises after the concept of being as process.

A couple of things deserve to be noted here. First, change can only be understood in substance ontology terms. There must be some “thing” that changes, and this “thing” must exist in its own right, that is, it must be determinate, albeit not determinate in a fixed structure that always remains the same. It is a determinateness that changes, becomes. This means that the understanding of being upon which a Process understanding is based is still a substance understanding of being. The difference being simply that the substance understanding is not fixed or permanent in a Process understanding. It still, however, remains grounded upon determinate, albeit changing and dynamic, being. (To examine this “process” understanding further lies beyond our present scope. We will examine the “Process” understanding in contrast to our in somewhat more detail later.) What Fromm’s criticism entails is that “to have” is grounded in a substance ontology understanding in which things are determinate in a fixed and permanent way, and the concept of “to have/possess” only arises with the understanding of determinate being as fixed and permanent. The second important consideration here is that however this may be, this does not affect our thesis. All that is required for the understanding here is that “σχέσις”, which primarily means “state” or “condition”, is open to being adapted to a new understanding of relation which is not “πρός τι”. Because “σχέσις” is understood as “state” or “condition”, when it becomes associated with the concept of relation, it is open to reflecting an understanding of relation that is understood as a

In terms of the Trinity this is significant in that the relation between the Persons is not a relation between relata; rather it is the condition which constitutes the nature of the Persons. The Persons are themselves, ontologically, relations.

This inherent relationality of the relata themselves is to be expected given the nature of Pure Relationality, and if God, the First Principle of Being, is Pure Relation, then the Triune nature of God, His threeness, is not arbitrary or accidental. The nature of relationality itself entails three elements: the relation and two relata.⁵⁸ In order for relation to be relation, it must relate. Thus, relationality itself entails relata, that is, something which relation relates. As was seen earlier, it is also the case, however, that relationality must be the ontological ground of any relata, and so must be ontologically prior to the relata. How is this to be understood if relata are entailed by the nature of relationality itself, and relationality is ontologically prior to relata? The resolution of this dilemma is that the relata, which Pure Relation relates, must themselves be pure relation. This is precisely what is entailed by the doctrine of the Trinity, and it came to be expressed in Christian theology in the formula that God is one οὐσία (essence) and three ὑπόστασεις (Persons).⁵⁹ As already seen, however, this means that the

“state” or “condition” in its own right, as opposed to relation being understood as being grounded upon two ontologically prior entities. This understating of relation (which “σχέσις” represents) is a necessary development once we get to the Christian Neoplatonists, since the Persons of the Trinity cannot be understood as independently existing entities; they can only be understood as ontologically primordial relations. So however the concept of “have” or “possess” developed historically, and however the concept of “state” or “condition” developed out of that, the concepts “state” and “condition”, because they are open to more nuanced understandings, can develop into a concept of relation as something in its own right and not dependent on the relata which it relates. This is the crucial point for our thesis, and this development is precisely what we find in the way the Church Father adapt and use “σχέσις” to mean “relation” in application to the nature of the Trinity. Even assuming that Fromm is correct in his analysis, the fact that “σχέσις” develops into the concepts of “state” or “condition”, which are open to a broader range of meanings than “have” and “possess”, allows the opportunity for understanding “σχέσις” as “relation” to develop into a new understanding of relation which is not grounded upon determinate being and which is, therefore, not “πρός τι”.

⁵⁸This is so since, as we saw earlier (see Chap. 1, section “The Problem”), relation cannot be grounded in either of the relata independently or both together. Relation must, therefore, be independent of the relata.

⁵⁹Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1, 219. Pelikan also gives a detailed examination of how this came to be formulated in these terms and the difficulties surrounding its formulation.

Trinity is inseparably separate; the three are one, and the one is three. God is distinct in His Threeness and at the same time indistinct in His Unity. God, as One essence and Three Persons, is identical yet distinct.

The Cappadocian Fathers

This brief introduction to the nature of relationality within the Trinity, however, requires a more thorough explanation. To this end, an examination of the Church Fathers and their teaching on the nature of the Trinity will be helpful. Given the influential nature of the Cappadocian Fathers, particularly in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity, the discussion here will focus on St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Gregory Nazianzus. As Hopko notes, “Cappadocian teachings have been accepted by Christians of East and West on the nature and action of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not only in their relationship to the world of their creation, particularly to human persons made in their image and likeness, but also in their eternal and divine communion.”⁶⁰

So what is the Cappadocian understanding of the nature of the Trinity? In *On the Holy Spirit* 18.44–45, St. Basil the Great expresses the traditional understanding of the relation of the one οὐσία and three ὑπόστασις:

In delivering the formula of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, our Lord did not connect the gift with number. He did not say “into First, Second, and Third,” nor yet “into one, two, and three”, but He gave us the boon of the knowledge of the faith which leads to salvation, by means of holy names. So that what saves us is our faith. Number has been devised as a symbol indicative of the quantity of objects.... Count, if you must; but you must not by counting do damage to the faith. Either let the ineffable be honoured by silence; or let holy things be counted consistently with true religion.

There is one God and Father, one Only-begotten, and one Holy Ghost. We proclaim each of the hypostases singly; and, when count we must, we do not let an ignorant arithmetic carry us away to the idea of a plurality of Gods. For we do not count by way of addition, gradually making increase from unity to multitude, and saying one, two, and three,—nor yet first, second, and third. For “I,” God, “am the first, and I am the last.” And hith-

⁶⁰ Hopko, Thomas, “The Trinity in the Cappadocians”, in *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, and Jean Lederq (New York: Crossroad, 1985), 261.

erto we have never, even at the present time, heard of a second God. Worshipping as we do God of God, we both confess the distinction of the Persons, and at the same time abide by the Monarchy. We do not fritter away the theology in a divided plurality, because one Form, so to say, united in the invariableness of the Godhead, is beheld in God the Father, and in God the Only begotten. For the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son; since such as is the latter, such is the former, and such as is the former, such is the latter; and herein is the Unity. So that according to the distinction of Persons, both are one and one, and according to the community of Nature, one. How, then, if one and one, are there not two Gods? Because we speak of a king, and of the king's image, and not of two kings. The majesty is not cloven in two, nor the glory divided. The sovereignty and authority over us is one, and so the doxology ascribed by us is not plural but one; because the honour paid to the image passes on to the prototype. Now what in the one case the image is by reason of imitation, that in the other case the Son is by nature; and as in works of art the likeness is dependent on the form, so in the case or the divine and uncompounded nature the union consists in the communion of the Godhead. One, moreover, is the Holy Spirit, and we speak of Him singly, conjoined as He is to the one Father through the one Son, and through Himself completing the adorable and blessed Trinity. Of Him the intimate relationship to the Father and the Son is sufficiently declared by the fact of His not being ranked in the plurality of the creation, but being spoken of singly; for he is not one of many, but One. For as there is one Father and one Son, so is there one Holy Ghost. He is consequently as far removed from created Nature as reason requires the singular to be removed from compound and plural bodies; and He is in such wise united to the Father and to the Son as unit has affinity with unit.⁶¹

Behr explains the passage as follows:

The first and most important point is that Basil categorically excludes any suggestion of a “second God.” For the Christian faith there is, unequivocally, but one God, and that is the Father: “There is one God and Father.” For Basil, the one God is not the one divine substance, or a notion of “divinity” which is ascribed to each person of the Trinity, nor is it some kind of unity or communion in which they all exist; the one God is the Father. But

⁶¹ St. Basil the Great, *Letters and Selected Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 14 vols., vol. 8, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 27–28.

this “monarchy” of the Father does not undermine the confession of the true divinity of the Son and the Spirit.⁶²

More succinctly, Prestige states it thus: “While we worship God out of God and confess the particularity of the hypostaseis, ‘we rest in the monarchy’ and do not scatter the divine principle into a separated multitude; it is the one form which is seen in God the Father and in God the Only-begotten, imaged through the undeviating character of the godhead; the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son.”⁶³ What is of greatest significance here is (1) the notion of the “monarchy” of the Father and (2) the absolute rejection that the distinction of Persons entails multiplicity in God. The “monarchy of the Father” is the idea that there is one source or cause within the Trinity, and this source is the Father. And this monarchy itself entails the unity of the Trinity. “In this one cause”, as Pelikan notes, “was the guarantee of the unity of the Three.”⁶⁴ To understand how this guarantees the unity of the Trinity, it is necessary to examine the concept of “monarchy of the Father” and the distinction of the ὑπόστασεις more closely.

The monarchy of the Father entails that it is the Person of the Father which is the one God. The Creed formulated at Nicaea expresses this quite bluntly: “We believe in one God, the Father....”⁶⁵ In *Oration* 25.15, Gregory Nazianzus says,

Define too for us our orthodox faith by teaching us to recognize *one God, unbegotten, the Father*, and one begotten Lord, his Son, referred to as God when he is mentioned separately, but Lord when he is named in conjunction with the Father, the one term on account of his nature, the other on account of his monarchy; and one Holy Spirit proceeding, or, if you will, going forth from the Father, God to those with the capacity to apprehend things that are interrelated....⁶⁶ (emphasis added)

⁶² Behr, John, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2, Formation of Christian Theology (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 307.

⁶³ Prestige, G. L., *God in Patristic Thought* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1964), 230.

⁶⁴ Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1, 223.

⁶⁵ For a deeper theological understanding of all this entails, see Behr, John, “One God Father Almighty”, *Modern Theology* 34, no. 3 (2018).

⁶⁶ St. Gregory Nazianzus, *Select Orations*, 170–171.

St. Basil the Great, in *Letter* 38.4, states, “But God, Who is over all, alone has, as one special mark of His own hypostasis, His being Father, and His deriving His hypostasis from no cause; and through this mark He is peculiarly known.”⁶⁷ St. Basil also here notes that it is *hypostasis* that marks distinction; it is the *hypostases* that give particularity to the nature of God. Earlier in the same letter he says, “This then is the hypostasis, or ‘*understanding*’;⁶⁸ not the indefinite conception of the essence or substance, which, because what is signified is general, finds no ‘*standing*,’ but the conception which by means of the *expressed peculiarities* gives *standing* and circumscription to the general and uncircumscribed”⁶⁹ (italicized emphasis in the translation, italicized and boldened emphasis added). What this means is that the special mark of the *hypostasis* of God is His nature as Father: the hypostasis of the Father *is* the one God. Zizioulas notes, “God as person—as the hypostasis of the Father—makes the one divine substance to be that which it is: the one God.”⁷⁰ What these passages reveal is that the person of the Father is the one God. Hopko remarks, “For the Cappadocians, therefore, the one God of faith is the Father.”⁷¹ This does not, however, render the other Persons distinct from God, so as to be either three gods or not God at all. As the long quote from St. Basil above makes clear, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all one God, inseparable in number. St. Gregory Nazianzus is also explicit, “And when I say God, I mean Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”⁷² And it has already been asserted that the monarchy of the Father, far from rendering God multiple, guarantees the unity of the Godhead.

How, then, does the Father being identified as the one God entail the unity of the Godhead? It is through the inherent relationality of the Father, of the one God, that the unity of the Persons is entailed. According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, “while we confess the invariable character of the nature [of God], we do not deny the *difference in respect of cause*, and that which is caused, *by which alone* we apprehend that one Person is distinguished

⁶⁷ St. Basil the Great, *Letters and Selected Works*, 8, 139.

⁶⁸ Literally, hypostasis means “under-stand”. “Hyper” means “under” and “stasis” means “stand” in Greek.

⁶⁹ *Letter* 38.3 St. Basil the Great, *Letters and Selected Works*, 8, 137–138.

⁷⁰ Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 41.

⁷¹ Hopko, “The Trinity in the Cappadocians”, 265.

⁷² *Oration* 45.4 St. Gregory Nazianzus, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen*, 7, 424.

from another”⁷³ (emphasis added). Pelikan notes, “Specifically on the question of distinctions among the Three, he [St. Gregory of Nyssa] identified *causality as the only real point of distinction*, stating that one was the cause, namely, the Father, and that the Son and the Spirit were derived from him, but eternally”⁷⁴ (emphasis added). St. Basil further asserts,

Indeed, it is clear to anyone who examines these names, I mean “Father” and “Son,” that they do not in their proper and primary sense naturally give rise to the notion of corporeal passions. On the contrary, *when they are said by themselves they indicate only their relation [σχέσιν] to one another*. The Father is he who provides to another the beginning of being in a nature similar to his own, whereas the Son is he who has the beginning of his being from another in a begotten way.⁷⁵ (emphasis added)

Clearly then, what distinguishes the Persons is nothing other than their relation. One “causes” the other, and one is “caused” by the other. Relation and relation alone is the mark of distinction.

This causality, however, is not indicative of a particular type of relation by which one thing causes another to come into existence; rather it indicates only the relation itself. As St. Basil notes concerning the relation of the Son to the Father,

The God of the universe is Father from infinity; he did not at some point begin to be Father... he has a Fatherhood (if I may give it such a name) that is coextensive with his own eternity. Therefore, it is also the case that the Son, who exists before the age and always, did not at some point begin to exist. From whatever point the Father exists, the Son also exists, and the notion of the Son immediately enters along with the notion of Father. For it is clear that the Father is a father *of a son*.⁷⁶ (emphasis in the translation)

There is no Father without the Son, and there is no Son without the Father. They mutually entail each other: they can only be what they are in

⁷³ *On “Not Three Gods”* St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 5, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 336.

⁷⁴ Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, 1, 223.

⁷⁵ *Against Eunomius* 2.22 St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, ed. David G. Hunter, trans. Mark Delcogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 164.

⁷⁶ *Against Eunomius* 2.12 *ibid.*, 145–146.

the other, in their mutual interrelationality. Behr states, “What is important to Basil in the name of God as ‘Father’ is precisely the relationship to his Son. The names ‘father’ and ‘son,’ Basil argues, do not primarily indicate the corporeal passions involved in human parenthood, and from which, of course, theological teachings should be purified. If considered in themselves, ‘they express solely the relation to one another’ (*Eun* 2.22).”⁷⁷ To say that one is “cause” is simply to say that one is the source of the relation. It does nothing other than to distinguish one Person from the other in the order relationality itself. Without a “source” or “principle” of the relation, there is no distinction within pure relationality itself. The Father is not the “cause” as if one thing exists and brings another into existence. The Father is the “cause” or “source” in that He is the “begetter” of the Son. He is one “side” of the relation of begetting to which the Son is the other “side”. This relation of begetting is, itself, the distinction between Father and Son. The Father begets the Son, and the Son is begotten of the Father. There is no Father without the Son, and there is no Son without the Father. To be the one entails the other. The relation of Father to Son as begetter is what constitutes the *hypostasis* of the Father. And the same is true of the Son in that the relation of the Son to the Father as begotten distinguishes the *hypostasis* of the Son. Thus, that the Father is the source only serves to distinguish the Father and Son, but, significantly, it also serves to unify the Father and Son, since apart from the Son there is no Father. The Father and Son simply are their relationality (i.e., the relationality of begetting), and this relationality is both their distinction and unity. The distinction is in order of relationality, not in order of being. In the order of being, they are one. That the relation of Father and Son simply are their relation also entails that they are simply pure relation, since they are nothing other than the relation.⁷⁸ And it is in this way that the monarchy guarantees the unity of God. The Father, in His relationality as the source, unifies the Persons with Himself, and since each of the Persons simply is His relation, each entails the other. Thus they are *essentially* indistinct.

This is clear in relation to the Father and Son, but how does it relate to the Holy Spirit? It is now necessary to explain the distinction between the Persons more carefully. This distinction appears both ontologically and

⁷⁷ Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 2, 309.

⁷⁸ The same also holds true for the relationality of the Father and Holy Spirit in the relation of procession, as will be shown.

economically, and while the ontological and economical are two distinct ways of marking the hypostases, they are also mutually interrelated.⁷⁹ As St. Basil said, “But God, Who is over all, alone has, as one special mark of His own hypostasis, His being Father, and His deriving His hypostasis from no cause; and through this mark He is peculiarly known.” Thus, ontologically, the distinctive mark of the Father is that He is the source. However, St. Basil emphasizes a second distinctive mark which is not ontological but economical: through His being source, He is made known. Nevertheless, it is by virtue of the ontological, that is, the Father’s *being* source, that the economical, that is, being made known, arises. In *Letter* 38.4, St. Basil notes regarding the Son, “Now, the Son, who through Himself and with Himself makes known the Spirit which proceeds from the Father and who alone shines forth as the Only-begotten from the Unbegotten Light, shares in common with the Father or with the Holy Spirit none of the peculiar marks by which the Son is known, but He alone is recognized by the marks just mentioned.”⁸⁰ As with the Father, the distinctive mark is both ontological, that is, that He is Only begotten, and economical, that is, that He makes known the Spirit. Here too the ontological and economical are interrelated: it is through Himself and with Himself, that is, it is in His own nature as Son, that He, economically, makes known the Holy Spirit. If, however, the pure relationality of the Persons is to be maintained, then ontologically there must be both distinction and unity between the Holy Spirit and the Son.⁸¹ We see this necessary relation in *On the Holy Spirit* 18.45, when St. Basil says, “One, moreover, is the Holy Spirit, and we speak of Him singly, conjoined as He is to the one Father through the one Son, and through Himself completing the adorable and blessed Trinity.”⁸² And again in *Letter* 38.4 when he says,

⁷⁹ “Economical” in this sense refers to God’s dealing with the world. It is derived from the Greek word “οἰκονομία”, which means “management of a household or family”. (Liddell, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 1204.)

⁸⁰ St. Basil the Great, *Letters Volume 1 (1-185)*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Sister Agnes Clare Way, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 88.

⁸¹ Siecienski notes the necessity of this relation when, discussing the *filioque* controversy, he notes that “Photius never explored the... necessary eternal relationship between the Son and the Spirit.” (Siecienski, A. Edward, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 10.)

⁸² St. Basil the Great, *Letters and Selected Works*, 8, 28.

Since, therefore, the Holy Spirit from whom all the abundance of benefits pours out upon the creature is linked with the Son with whom He is inseparably comprehended, and has His existence dependent on the Father as a principle, from whom He also proceeds, this He has as the distinguishing mark of the individuality of His person, namely, that He is made known after the Son and with the Son and that He subsists from the Father.⁸³

Again, the distinctive mark is both ontological in that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is *linked with* the Son, and economical in that the Holy Spirit is made known after and with the Son.⁸⁴ Again, the ontological and economical are interrelated: the Spirit's hypostatic distinction, that is, what makes Him a Person, is both His procession from the Father and His being "linked with" the Son, and it is His being linked with the Son by which He is made known, by which He is comprehended. With these considerations, we can see that the only distinction between the Persons is their interrelationality. The Father is the source of begetting and proceeding, but without the Begotten and Proceeded there is no Source, and without the Source, that is, the Begetter and Proceeder, there is no Begotten or Proceeded. Thus, the Father Begets and Proceeds, the Son is Begotten, and the Spirit is Proceeded, since it is these relations which define and mark their nature as Persons, we can see that their interrelationality both distinguishes them ontologically, since their relations are distinct, *and* unites them ontologically in their interrelationality, since their relationality ties them ontologically to the other Persons.

It is worth noting that there is a ranking here, but this is to be expected both in terms of Pure Relation itself and in terms of the primordial relationality of God. Relation itself is first in order and dignity to the things which it relates and which are founded upon it. Relation Itself is the source of the relata, and so is first and is greater in honor than that which it relates. This is reflected within the Godhead in the ranking which results from the monarchy of the Father. St. Basil explains,

The Son is second to the Father in rank because he is from him. He is second to the Father in dignity because the Father is the principle and cause by

⁸³ St. Basil the Great, *Letters Volume 1* (1-185), 88.

⁸⁴ While the important point here is the ontological distinction, the economical is not insignificant. One might argue that the ontological and economical distinctions become blurred here since the Holy Spirit is distinct by being *with* the Son in both. The implications of this blurring, however, lie beyond the scope of the project here.

virtue of which he is the Son's Father and because we approach and access the God and Father through the Son. Even so, the Son is not second in nature, since there is one divinity in both of them. Likewise, it is clear that, even if the Holy Spirit is below the Son in both rank and dignity—something with which we too are in total agreement—it is still not likely that he is of a foreign nature.⁸⁵

Behr describes the ranking as follows:

The Spirit's activity of making known the Son is further illustrated for Basil by Paul's words that "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor 12:3). As it is through the Son that we are led to know the Father (citing Mt 11:27), Basil concludes that "the way of the knowledge of God (θεογνωσίας) lies from the one Spirit through the one Son to the one Father; and conversely, the natural goodness and inherent holiness and the royal dignity extend from the Father through the Only-begotten to the Spirit." (Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 18.47)⁸⁶

What this shows is that there is distinction, and even ranking, but this distinction and ranking does not entail multiplicity or subordination. It is a distinction and ranking in the order of relation, but not in the essence of relation. In the order of relation, the Father is first; the Son is second, being of the Father alone; and the Spirit is third, being of the Father and with the Son. But this is simply because the Father is the source from which the other two derive. It is not a ranking of distinction in essence. It is also an economical ranking since the Spirit makes known the Son who makes known the Father. In the essence of relation, however, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one. This also St. Basil recognizes when, in *On the Holy Spirit* 17.43, he rejects the subordination of one Person to another, stating:

Do you maintain that the Son is numbered under the Father, and the Spirit under the Son, or do you confine your subnumeration to the Spirit alone? If, on the other hand, you apply this subnumeration also to the Son, you revive what is the same impious doctrine, the unlikeness of the substance (οὐσίας), the lowliness of rank, the coming into being in later time, and once for all, by this one term, you will plainly again set circling all the blasphemies against the Only-begotten. To controvert these blasphemies would be a longer task than my present purpose admits of; and I am the less bound to undertake it because the impiety has been refuted elsewhere to the best of

⁸⁵ St. Basil the Great, *Against Eunomius*, 186.

⁸⁶ Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 2, 312.

my ability. If on the other hand they suppose the subnumeration to benefit the Spirit alone, they must be taught that the Spirit is spoken of together with the Lord in precisely the same manner in which the Son is spoken of with the Father. “The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost” is delivered in like manner, and, according to the co-ordination of words delivered in baptism, the relation of the Spirit to the Son is the same as that of the Son to the Father. And if the Spirit is co-ordinate (συντέτακται) with the Son, and the Son with the Father, it is obvious that the Spirit is also co-ordinate with the Father.⁸⁷

By stating (1) that by subnumerating the Son to the Father one subordinates the οὐσία of the Son to the οὐσία of Father which would be unacceptable and (2) that since the relation of the Spirit to the Son is the same as the Son to the Father one therefore cannot subnumerate the Spirit to the Son or the Father, St. Basil shows that all three Persons of the Trinity must be ranked together in their οὐσία, that is, in their essence.⁸⁸ What follows from this is that within the Trinity, the Persons simply *are* their interrelations, nothing else distinguishes them, and so they are pure relationality. Therefore there is an ontological unity: in their *being*, their οὐσία, they are one. Prestige sums up the Cappadocian understanding in this way, “God is one object *in* Himself and three objects *to* Himself”⁸⁹ (emphasis in the original). The relationality inherent in both prepositions “in” and “to” is significant. While the use of the term “object” might be objectionable, it is clear that the distinction of the hypostases lies in their relation and not in their essence, while at the same time, it is the very relationality of God’s essence, which is identified with the Father, which unites the Trinity making God one.

The Trinity as Pure Relation

This addresses the distinctions of the Persons and their Unity, but why must the Trinity be triune? Why does Pure Relationality require a Trinity?

⁸⁷ St. Basil the Great, *Letters and Selected Works*, 8, 27.

⁸⁸ This should not be interpreted to indicate that the Son is a cause of the Spirit like the Father is the cause of the Son. As we saw in St. Basil’s *Letter* 38.4, the Holy Spirit’s existence depends on the Father as principle, that is, as cause. All that is being emphasized here is the unity of the Persons. If the relation of the Spirit to the Son were ontologically the same as the Son to the Father, then the Son would be the only source of the Spirit, the Spirit would be begotten of the Son, and the Spirit would become Son and the Son would become Father. This is clearly not what St. Basil has in mind.

⁸⁹ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 249.

As St. Basil noted in *On the Holy Spirit* 18.45, the Holy Spirit “completes” (συμπληρώω) the Trinity. How is this the case? A more in-depth investigation of the necessity and nature of the tri-unity of the First Principle is warranted. It was already shown that Relation itself is ordered first in relation to determinate relata, since relation is the source of the determinate relata which are grounded upon it and from which they, the determinate relata, receive their determinateness. However, while in determinate relations ranking exists between Relation itself and the relata, a triadic ranking in which relata are ranked among themselves might, nevertheless, seem strange. In determinate relations Relation, upon which the relata are grounded, is first in rank and then the determinate relata are equally ranked second as grounded upon Relation as determinate beings. The triadic ranking, however, appears precisely because within the Trinity the relata are purely relational. The Son is second as the first relata after the Father. But the Father is the relationality from which the Son is the Son, and the Father is also the relata to which the Son is related. The Son has His being simply in relation to the Father, while the Father *is* Father in His relation to the Son. The Son is Son *with* the Father, which entails their mutual interrelationality. But as it stands, there are only two relational relata. A third element is necessary. All relationality requires three elements: relation and two relata (this is so because relation must be distinct from the things it relates as has been shown). Therefore, since this is Pure Relationality, in order to be truly relational it too requires three elements. With Pure Relationality, however, these three elements must each themselves be pure relation. This is so (1) because relation must be prior to determinate relata and therefore the relata which are constituted within Pure Relation cannot be determinate, and (2) since there must be relata *within* pure, independent, and indeterminate Relation, these relata must themselves be purely relational. Thus, a third element is required, and this third element is the Holy Spirit which is *from* the Father and *with* the Son. Thus the Holy Spirit coming after both Father and Son is third in rank.

How this is so merits further clarification. The relationality with the Father alone makes the Son a Son, so the Father is first, as source, and the Son is second, since the Son requires only the relationality of the Father for His sonship. In other words, the Father is the relationality which grounds the Son as relata, from which the sonship of the Son is derived. This is so because sonship, by its very nature, is derived *from* fatherhood. Thus, the Son is second in rank after the Father. But the Father is also relata to which the Son is related. This is so because begottenness is the

relationship between a father and a son. So Father and Son are both relation and relata, ranked first and second respectively. But as a third element is required to perfect the relationality which the Father and Son are, the Holy Spirit, as this third element, is required.⁹⁰ Thus, the Spirit is Spirit by virtue of the relationality of proceeding *from* the Father and *being with* the Son.⁹¹ Thus, by His procession from the Father, the Spirit is relata related to the Father via procession, but as a third element distinct from the Son (otherwise the Son and Spirit would be completely indistinct and would be a single relata), the Spirit *qua* Spirit is *with* the Son. The Son *qua* Son only requires the Father for His sonship, but the Spirit, in His distinction from the Son, requires the relationality of procession from the Father as well as His being with the Son for His spirithood. And so the relationality of the Holy Spirit requires both the Father and the Son, and in His procession, the Spirit is both relata to the Father and relation *with* the Son.⁹² Thus He, the Holy Spirit, is third in rank and is this third element that all relationality requires. The Persons are each triadically ranked since each is both relation, which is ranked before relata, and relata, which is ranked

⁹⁰ As relation, each Person requires two relata, and as relata, each Person requires another relata and relation to relate them. Although it will be shown below as well, it is worth noting here that since the Persons are pure relation, as such are indeterminate, and are therefore both distinct and indistinct from each other, the interrelationality of the Persons is a self-relationality. This self-relationality of Personhood becomes important later in the history of philosophy. See Chap. 6, section “Implications”.

⁹¹ I would further argue that just as a son *qua* son cannot be understood independently by itself but is always the son *of* a father, so also spirit *qua* spirit is not understood independently by itself but is always a spirit *of* some being or creature. To say “Spirit” without the implicit understanding of some being of which the spirit is the spirit makes little sense to me. If I say “I saw a spirit”, it is understood that it is the spirit of a person or beast or some other being which was seen, and someone might coherently respond, “What was it a spirit of?” The same is not true if I say, “I saw a table.” The response, “What was it a table of?” makes no sense. This would indicate that the very concept of spirit, just like the concept of son or father, is relational in itself. However, regardless whether this argument is accepted or not, the rest of the discussion holds.

⁹² The “with” here simply indicates a distinction from while sharing relationality with the Son. This seems to me the clearest understanding of what is meant by the Spirit being “with the Son” in St. Basil’s *Letter* 38.4 and *On the Holy Spirit* 17.43 quoted earlier. This should not be interpreted to indicate a causal relationship between the Spirit and the Son, as if the Son were the (or a) source of the Spirit’s existence as Spirit.

after relation. But because they are each pure relation, and so indistinct in their essence, this ranking is not a subordination.⁹³

An important question arises here which requires to be addressed. It has been argued and asserted that Relation is ontologically prior to relata. It has been further argued that this must be the case for relata to be relata, that is, apart from relation there can be no relata. It has also been noted, however, that relation requires relata to be complete, to be perfect: without something to relate there is no relation. The question is then: Why can it not be the case that relation and relata co-constitute each other? Why can one not say that relation and relata ontologically ground each other? The simple answer is: they do. Relation and relata do, in fact, co-constitute each other. This, in fact, must be the case, since, as has been recognized, relation, in order to be relation, must relate. But this it does in its very nature as relation. As Pure Relation, Relation must relate to itself. It cannot be Pure Relation if it isn't self-related. Otherwise *in itself* it is not Relation. But this is what we find in the Trinity. The Persons are the self-relation of Pure Relation. They are relata which are themselves simply relation. What is also the case, however, is that relation and *determinate* relata cannot co-constitute each other. They cannot ontologically ground each other. It has already been shown that to be determined is to be related, but this is a limited relation. Determination is, in fact, simply limitation. Relation cannot be limited, or else it is not pure relation. It would require something other than itself to provide limitation/determination.

⁹³How does this relate to the question of the *filioque*? A detailed answer to this question lies beyond the scope of this project, however, a brief answer can, I believe, be given. The *filioque* would not be warranted by this understanding because it would blur the distinction between the Father and Son making the Father and Son a single relata to which the Spirit is related. But Father and Son must both be distinct relata in their own right. This understanding maintains that. The Spirit is relata to the Father but distinct from the Son in being *with* the Son. The Son is distinct from the Spirit in that the Spirit is *with* the Son. Since being *with* the Son simply indicates a distinction from the Son while being within the same relationality with the Son, and since the Son doesn't require distinction from the Spirit in order to be the Son (although He does require distinction from the Spirit as a third element in His, the Son's, relationality), the Son *qua* Son is not *with* the Spirit (He is, however, with the Spirit in the aspect of His being one of the Trinity). If the Spirit were not *with* the Son, however, the Spirit would be indistinct from the Son. The relation of procession, in order to be distinct from begottenness (i.e., in order to distinguish the Son from the Spirit), entails that what proceeds be *with* what was begotten. In other words, the relation of procession from the Father entails that the Spirit be with what came second after the Father (i.e., the Son) as both distinct from the Son and within the same pure relationality as the Son. And the Son, as requiring a third element to perfect His relationality, requires the Spirit to be with Him.

Determination requires this. To be determinate is to be *other* than. If there is no *other*, against which something is determinate/limited, then there is no limitation; there no determination. As was shown earlier, if relationality lies within the determinate relata, then nothing else is required but the one simple entity to be in relation.⁹⁴ But this cannot be the case. To be determinate/limited requires some *other*. A determinate relata without some other is not related. Thus, the relation which exists apart from determinate relata must be Pure Relation which is self-related, that is, is its own relata. Again, this is what is found in the Trinity: it is a Pure Relationality which is distinct but not other; it is three and one, divided yet undivided, separate inseparably.

For the sake of greater clarity, a final point deserves a more complete explication. Since the Father's *hypostasis* is identified with the one God, and this *hypostasis* has been shown to be purely relational, the *ousia* itself of God is revealed as Pure Relation. Because the Father is the one God, and the Father is simply pure relationality (i.e., the Father simply *is* His relation to the Son), so also the essence of God is Pure Relation. That the Father is "cause" or "source" of the Trinity further indicates the necessity of relationality to relate. Relation, as noted earlier, requires relata; it requires to relate. It is on these terms that Pure Relation is the "source" or "cause" of the relata (i.e., Persons). And it is, therefore, in this relating that Pure Relation is perfected. Pure Relation *must* relate. It is imperfect unless and until it relates. And so it does. It relates itself to itself in purely relational relata. Thus the Trinity—in which the Persons of the Trinity are relata but relata which are themselves purely relational—is the perfection of God.⁹⁵

How is this understanding reflected in the Christian Neoplatonists? Before examining Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa, it is fitting to discuss two major influences on both: Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor. In this regard, we will explore how relationality manifests both in their understanding of the Trinity and in their understanding of the nature of created beings. This exploration will also reveal the

⁹⁴ See Chap. 1, section "The Problem".

⁹⁵ Of course, everything said here must be taken with quite a bit of circumspection. As St. Gregory of Nazianzus stated, "What then is Procession? Do you tell me what is the Unbegottenness of the Father, and I will explain to you the physiology of the Generation of the Son and the Procession of the Spirit, and we shall both of us be frenzy-stricken for prying into the mystery of God." *Oration* 31.8 (St. Gregory Nazianzus, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzen*, 7, 320.)

continuity that runs from the Cappadocians, through Dionysius and St. Maximus, and into Eriugena and Nicholas of Cusa.

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite

Beierwaltes may be correct: “Each personal characteristic in the Trinity remains in Dionysius’ Trinitarian discussion relatively abstract; the *inner-trinitarian* being and action of the particular persons is simply mentioned in a few basic words, but not actually analysed”⁹⁶ (emphasis in the original). In fact, given emphasis on the One in Dionysius—an aspect common in all Neoplatonists—the concept of the Trinity in his thought has been considered controversial. Beierwaltes notes,

It is within Dionysius scholarship, at least since Ferdinand Christian Baur clearly and repeatedly stated as a *communis opinio*, that Dionysius did not have a close affinity to the doctrine of the Trinity; despite particular trinitarian statements, there is, it is said, no ‘explicit doctrine of the Trinity’. It is further argued that the Trinity is a rather alien element in his thought, and Trinitarian unity is merely ‘a particular case of the metaphysical’: it is the inwardly concentrated and yet outwardly creatively orientated, self-overflowing causal unity and goodness. Thus, the argument continues, trinitarian reductionism for Dionysius is the result of the attempt to ‘legitimate himself theologically without therewith compromising himself philosophically by insisting upon three consubstantial *hypostaseis* of one divine being’.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, as Beierwaltes and others recognize, a clear Trinitarian picture emerges in the Dionysian Corpus, and it will be seen that this picture images that of the Cappadocians.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Beierwaltes, Werner and Hedley, Douglas, “Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena”, *Hermathena: Neoplatonica: Studies in the Neoplatonic Tradition, Proceedings of the Dublin Conference on Neoplatonism*, no. 157 (1994).

⁹⁷ Ibid., 5. See his notes in this passage for a list of the scholars who hold such views.

⁹⁸ See Perl (Perl, Eric D., *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 122 n. 24), Golitzin (Golitzin, Alexander, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius the Areopagite, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition* (Thessalonica: Patriarchikon Idryma Paterikon Meleton, 1994), 51–54), and Pelikan, who says, “In his Trinitarian doctrine, to quote René Roques, Dionysius ‘appears to be substantially orthodox,’ and his Trinitarian language is quite conventional.” (Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. John Farina, trans. Colm Luibheid, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 19.)

Certainly for Dionysius God is One. Echoing familiar Neoplatonic language, in *The Divine Names* (DN) XIII.1–2, he says, “Theology, attributing every quality to the cause of everything [God], calls him ‘Perfect’ and ‘One.’” And he adds a few lines later, “The name ‘One’ means that God is uniquely all things through the transcendence of one unity and that he is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness. Nothing in the world lacks its share of the One.”⁹⁹ However, in the same section of the same text, Dionysius goes on to say, “The One cause of all things is not one of the many things in the world but actually precedes oneness and multiplicity and indeed defines oneness and multiplicity.”¹⁰⁰ Further, in DN II.11, Dionysius states, “He is one in an unchanging and transcendent way. He is not one part of a plurality nor yet a total of parts. Indeed his oneness is not of this kind at all, for he does not share in unity nor have it for his possession. Rather, he is one in a manner completely different from all this. He transcends the unity which is in beings. He is indivisible multiplicity (πλῆθος ἀμερές), the unfilled overfullness which produces, perfects, and preserves all unity and all multiplicity.”¹⁰¹ Earlier, in DN II.3, Dionysius explains, “Then there are the names expressing distinctions, the transcendent name and proper activity of the Father, of the Son, of the Spirit. Here the titles cannot be interchanged, nor are they held in common.”¹⁰² He further explains the nature of this differentiation a few lines later in DN II.4,

the indivisible Trinity holds within a shared undifferentiated unity its supra-essential subsistence, its supra-divine divinity, its supra-excellent goodness, its supremely individual identity beyond all that is, its oneness beyond the source of oneness, its ineffability, its many names, its unknowability, its wholly belonging to the conceptual realm, the assertion of all things, the denial of all things, that which is beyond every assertion and denial, and finally, if one may put it so, *the abiding and foundation of the divine persons who are the source of oneness as a unity which is totally undifferentiated and transcendent*.¹⁰³ (emphasis added)

⁹⁹ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 127–128.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 128.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 66–67.

¹⁰² Ibid., 60.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 61.

Golitzin explains this passage: “Each of the Three is unity and each the One, yet, although each is identical to the others, there is no exchange (ἀντιστροφή) among them of personal identity.”¹⁰⁴ Golitzin further notes, “Unity and difference are simultaneous and intrinsic to the very *esse* of divinity.”¹⁰⁵ Thus God, as is to be expected of the Trinity, is undifferentiated multiplicity in His unity. Dionysius even goes so far as to assert that it is the differentiation of Persons which grounds the unity of God. Perl sums this up, “This is not to say that Dionysius exalts divine unity or simplicity over the trinitarian distinctions, since Dionysius’ God, like the One of Plotinus, is neither one nor many, neither simple nor complex.”¹⁰⁶

Just as in Plotinus the lack of simple unity that is neither one nor many leads to a more proper understanding of the One as Pure Relation, so also with Dionysius. As was just seen, for Dionysius, it is the Trinity which grounds the unity of God.¹⁰⁷ It was also seen above, however, that the Trinity itself entails relationality.¹⁰⁸ In his discussion of Dionysius’ conception of the Trinity, Beierwaltes recognizes this necessary relationality of the Trinity: “No less decisive for the reflexive form of the Trinity is the ontological meaning of the concept of relation which founds and carries a reciprocal interpenetration of tri- and un-ity: Trinity as a correlative unity which is Itself only through self-relatedness.”¹⁰⁹ Precisely because Dionysius is Trinitarian, Beierwaltes adds, “Dionysius conceives the absolute divine unity (the [!] One) also as an internally *relational* tri-une oneness”¹¹⁰ (brackets and emphasis in the original). This relationality is necessary if, as the quote above from Dionysius asserts, it is “the abiding and foundation of the divine persons who are the source of oneness as a unity which is totally undifferentiated and transcendent”. Of the Persons

¹⁰⁴ Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius the Areopagite, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition*, 53.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁰⁶ Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 122 n. 24.

¹⁰⁷ As we saw above, for the Cappadocians, it is the Father which is the source of both the Godhead and Trinity and so is the source of the unity of the Godhead. Is Dionysius different here? Not necessarily. As we will see, Dionysius too accepts the Monarchy of the Father, and since the Persons of the Trinity are unified through the Father insofar as the Father as Father entails within Himself the Son and Holy Spirit, then to say that the Father is the source of Unity or the Trinity is the source of Unity is simply a matter of emphasis, not a difference of doctrine.

¹⁰⁸ See the Cappadocian understanding of the Trinity earlier in the chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Beierwaltes, “Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena”, 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

themselves, Dionysius, in DN II.5, says, “The Father is the only source of that Godhead which in fact is beyond being and the Father is not a Son nor is the Son a Father. Each of the divine persons continues to possess his own praiseworthy characteristics, so that one has here examples of unions and of differentiations in the inexpressible unity and subsistence of God.”¹¹¹ And in DN II.7, “we learn from the sacred scriptures that the Father is the originating source of the Godhead and that the Son and the Spirit are, so to speak, divine offshoots the flowering and transcendent lights of the divinity.”¹¹² These passages clearly reveal the Monarchy of the Father, which is reflective of the teaching of the Cappadocians, and once again Dionysius emphasizes both the distinction of the Father, Son, and Spirit and their unity. What, however, precisely constitutes this unity? Beierwaltes explains, “Notwithstanding the *prevalence of the One* as opposed to the other determinations in the whole of the Dionysian predication about the godhead, he did find a formula for the Trinity in which the dominance of the unity is suspended for the sake of a *relational perichoresis* of the three in a ‘being’ and thinking unity”¹¹³ (first emphasis is in the original, and second emphasis added). Beierwaltes here explains that the unity is a relational unity, and a relational unity of interpenetration or co-inherence. This is not surprising since, as was already shown, relationality is essentially constitutive of Fatherhood, Sonship, and Spirithood. And if it is the Persons themselves which ground the Unity of God, then, precisely because it is relationality which constitutes the fatherhood of the Father and the sonship of the Son, and, as was seen above, the very nature of the Spirit as well, then it must necessarily be relationality itself which establishes God’s Unity.

In any Neoplatonic system, the characteristics of the First Principle, the “One”, must be reflected in the things which follow from It, participate in It; the same is true for Dionysius.¹¹⁴ Repeatedly, he asserts that the Unity of God is reflected in the unity of beings. For example, in DN II.11, he

¹¹¹ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 62.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 64.

¹¹³ Beierwaltes, “Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena”, 7. (For a good discussion of the history and meaning of the term “perichoresis”, see Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, Ch. 14.)

¹¹⁴ This is necessary in any fundamentally relational ontology. If the First Principle is Relation, and entities only *are* in relation to this First Principle, then it is only by reflecting the pure relationality, which the First Principle is, that entities have their being (and it is hopelessly obvious that this being must thereby itself be relational).

states, “He is one and he dispenses his oneness to every part of the universe as well as to its totality, to the single as well as to the multiple.”¹¹⁵ And in DN V.1, he says,

The divine name “Good” tells of all the processions of the universal Cause; it extends to beings and nonbeings and that Cause is superior to being and nonbeings. The name “Being” extends to all beings which are, and it is beyond them. The name of “Life” extends to all living things, and yet is beyond them. The name “Wisdom” reaches out to everything which has to do with understanding, reason, and sense perception, and surpasses them all.¹¹⁶

From this it is clear that all things receive what they are from God and are reflections of the nature of God. Recognizing this in Dionysius, Perl describes God’s relation to the world in the Areopagite as a “theophany”: “For Dionysius, then, as for Plotinus and Proclus, the whole of reality, all that is, is theophany, the manifestation or appearance of God. For the entire content of any being is God present in it in a distinct, finite way, and, in virtue of this distinction and finitude, knowable in that being as its intelligible content.”¹¹⁷ This manifestation of God is also hierarchical in terms of the degree to which things manifest God.

The Good is first, then, because as Goodness God is present in all beings and nonbeings.... Being comes next, because as Being he is present in all beings; next comes Life, for as Life God is present in all living things; and finally Wisdom, as which he is present in all cognitive beings. The order of the divine processions is thus a mirror image of the ranks of beings:

Good
Being
Life
Wisdom
cognitive living beings
living beings
(mere) beings
non-beings¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 66.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 96–97.

¹¹⁷ Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 32.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 65–66. Including “non-beings” on the list may seem puzzling, but as is typical in Neoplatonism, this refers to “matter”. Perl discusses this in depth (see *ibid.*, 68).

Thus things manifest God by virtue of the degree to which things manifest the Good, Being, Life, and Wisdom of God.

How, though, are Good, Being, Life, and Wisdom themselves to be understood? They are exemplars, paradigms, λόγοι; they are the principles which are the presence of God within created beings. Perl notes further,

He [God] is present to all beings as being, the universal character common to all beings such that they are beings: God ‘neither was nor will be nor came to be nor comes to be nor will come to be; rather, he is not. But he is being to beings [αὐτός ἐστι τὸ εἶναι τοῖς οὐσί]’ (DN V.4, 817D). Likewise he is present to all living things as life, the universal determination by which they are living things as distinct from non-living things. But the determining, constitutive divine presence is not limited to such exalted attributes as being and life, but includes all the features of each thing, which constitute it as that distinct thing, as itself, and hence as a being. ‘In the cause of all things the paradigms of all beings preexist... Paradigms... are the being-making determinations [οὐσιοποιούς... λόγους], pre-existing unitarily [ἐνιαίως] in God, of beings, which theology calls pre-determinations [προορισμούς], and good wills, determinative and creative [ἀφοριστικά καὶ ποιητικά] of beings, according to which the beyond-being both predetermined and produced all beings’ (DN V.8, 824C).¹¹⁹ Here these ‘paradigms’ or λόγοι contained without distinction in God, are explicitly identified as the defining or determining principles which make beings to be. God is thus present in each being as its determining or defining λόγος, by which it is itself and so is. All the features of all things, therefore, are God-in-them, making them to be by making them what they are, so that God is not only being in beings and life in living things but ‘all things in all things [τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι]’ (DN I.7, 596C).¹²⁰

The means by which things participate in God, then, is through these λόγοι, that is, principles. How are these λόγοι to be understood? They cannot be intermediaries between God and creation. To suggest such would

¹¹⁹To clarify, the entire passage Perl quotes from DN V.8 is translated in Dionysius the Areopagite, *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 102, as follows: “The exemplars of everything preexist as a transcendent unity within It.... We give the name of ‘exemplar’ to those principles which preexist as a unity in God and which produce the essences of things. Theology calls them predefining, divine and good acts of will which determine and create things and in accordance with which the Transcendent One predefined and brought into being everything that is.”

¹²⁰Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 29.

be incompatible with both Christian thought and Neoplatonic thought. In preparing to discuss Dionysius, Perl notes that it is not enough

to observe, as is often done, that intermediaries between God and creation are unacceptable to Christian doctrine. Rather, it is absolutely essential to the understanding of the entire tradition from Dionysius on, to recognize that such intermediaries are philosophically incoherent within Neoplatonism itself. . . . The absolute ontological difference between the First Principle and all that follows it is defined, as we have seen, by participation. This doctrine leaves no place for secondary beings which are not the First and yet do not exist by participation. Beings exist by participation in Being, which itself must therefore not exist by participation.¹²¹

And citing Dionysius DN V.2—"We do not say that the Good is one thing, Being another, Life or Wisdom another, nor that there are many causes and different divinities, set higher and lower, productive of different things; but that they are the whole good processions of the one God, and the divine namings praised among us"¹²²—Perl states, "They are not separately existing, multiple realities between God and the world, but that each and every one of the powers [λόγοι] is the whole God."¹²³ These λόγοι must be God Himself or else they would be creatures themselves which, in their turn, must participate in God and so could not be the means by which creatures participate in God, since they would themselves need to participate in God. Thus, "the intelligible, participated principles [λόγοι] of creation are effects of God in that they come from him who transcends them all as their cause. But they are not created things, because they do not exist by participation. They are effects only in that *they are God's impartations of himself*"¹²⁴ (emphasis added). Perl then adds, "Dionysius uses a varied terminology to express this. He calls these principles 'self-participations,' 'divine processions,' 'wills,' 'powers,' or

¹²¹ Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, 58–59.

¹²² Perl's translation.

¹²³ Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, 61.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60. I have identified "powers" and "principles" in the previous two passages with the λόγοι even though Perl himself does not explicitly identify them so in the text. This is justified, I believe, by the fact that in *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, Perl does explicitly identify the "paradigms" and "principles" with the λόγοι (see Perl, *Theophany: The Neoplatonic Philosophy of Dionysius the Areopagite*, 29, quoted above), and here, in *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Perl identifies these "powers" with the "principles" as noted below.

‘manifestations’ of God. All these terms indicate their uncreated status, their identity with God who is their source.”¹²⁵ If Perl is correct, then the λόγοι are the powers of God (e.g., Being, Good, Life, and Wisdom) in which things participate, and by doing so, they participate in the whole God. Golitzin calls them the “creative power of God realizing itself in creation” and notes that they are “divine and transcendent”.¹²⁶ Thus, they are God insofar as they are an uncreated manifestation of Himself in creation, and they are the means by which things participate in the whole God without being wholly God.¹²⁷ As the hierarchy above reveals, things participate in God to varying degrees. They are like pictures that reflect the whole image of something, but the further they get away from the original, the more blurry or shadowy, the less clear, they become.

From this, the relationality of things themselves becomes clear. On one level, the relationality of created beings is easy to recognize, since things only are what they are in relation to God through the λόγοι.¹²⁸ However, there is another level on which their relationality extends even deeper than this. Being theophanies, reflections of God, they also must be inherently relational as well, since God is, Himself, Relation. If it is the Trinity and its relationality which, as was shown above, grounds the unity of God for Dionysius, and if it is the unity of the “One”, that is, God, which is reflected in the things which follow after Him, then this unity in creation must also be a reflection of the Triune relationality of God.¹²⁹ This is so in that it is the Oneness of God and the Being of God which are the oneness and being of created beings and which make the created beings what they are. And since the Oneness and Being of God are relational, so also must be the created beings which they determine. This is so even if Dionysius never explicitly explains or asserts this.

¹²⁵ Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, 60.

¹²⁶ Golitzin, *Et Introibo ad Altare Dei: The Mystagogy of Dionysius the Areopagite, with Special Reference to Its Predecessors in the Eastern Christian Tradition*, 85–86.

¹²⁷ The discussion here brings to mind the energies/essence distinction found in St. Gregory Palamas (1296–1359). Although exploring this distinction in either thinker is beyond our scope here, there is certainly some influence of Dionysius on St. Gregory. For a good discussion of this issue, see Golitzin, Alexander, “Dionysius Areopagites in the Works of Saint Gregory Palamas: On the Question of a ‘Christological Corrective’ and Other Matters”, *Scrinium* 3, no. 1 (2007).

¹²⁸ While Dionysius never seems to make the explicit connection, that the λόγοι, insofar as they *are* God, are manifestations of the Λόγος/Word/Son seems inevitable.

¹²⁹ See DN XIII.1–2 quoted earlier.

If, as Beierwaltes notes at the beginning of this section, it is true that the Trinitarian discussion in Dionysius is abstract and relatively unanalyzed, such that Pelikan asserts, “The tension between Neo-Platonism and Christian orthodoxy is the crucial problem in the spirituality systematized by Pseudo-Dionysius and transmitted by him to subsequent generations”, it is, nevertheless, also true that “in many ways Dionysius may be said to represent the effort, more or less successful, to spell out in greater detail the philosophical presuppositions that had been at work all along in the system of Cappadocian spirituality”.¹³⁰ And in this light, if reflected upon closely, it is clear that the inherently relationality which grounds both Plotinus and the Cappadocian Fathers is also at work in Dionysius the Areopagite.

St. Maximus the Confessor

“What Maximus achieved was nothing less than the restoration of the balance between Neo-Platonism and Christian orthodoxy in a Christocentric piety whose roots lie deep in the Cappadocian tradition of Basil and the two Gregories.”¹³¹ So notes Pelikan, clearly indicating the importance of St. Maximus the Confessor to any discussion of Christian Neoplatonism. This importance is felt no less in the impact St. Maximus, as well as Dionysius and the Cappadocians, had on the Neoplatonists who came after. To point out one example, in discussing the influences on the thought of Eriugena, Jeuneau notes, “If John Scottus quotes Gregory of Nyssa at length and on a greater scale than the two others [Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and St. Maximus the Confessor], it is, perhaps, because he did not assimilate his thought as completely as he did that of Dionysius or that of Maximus.”¹³² From this it can be seen that St. Maximus the Confessor along with Dionysius and the Cappadocians are links in a continuous Neoplatonic chain. This continuity is clearly manifest in St. Maximus’ understanding of the Trinity which echoes the thoughts

¹³⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, ed. John Farina, trans. George C. Berthold, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 6–7.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹³² Jeuneau, Edouard, “Pseudo-Dionysius, Gregory of Nyssa, and Maximus the Confessor in the Works of John Scottus Eriugena”, in *Carolingian Essays*, ed. Uta-Renate Blumenthal (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 144.

of those who came before as well as reverberates through those who follow after.

Recognizing this continuity and to see how Trinitarian relationality manifests in St Maximus' thought, we will first examine his understanding of the Monarchy of the Father. The Monarchy of the Father noticeably appears in his *Commentary on the Our Father*:

First of all the Lord, by these words [Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name: Thy Kingdom come], teaches those who say this prayer to begin as is fitting by "theology," and he initiates them into the mystery of the mode of existence of the creative Cause of things, since he himself is by essence the Cause of things. Indeed, the words of the prayer point out the Father, the Father's name, and the Father's kingdom to help us learn from the source himself to honor, to invoke, and to adore the one Trinity. For the name of God the Father who subsists essentially is the only-begotten Son, and the kingdom of God the Father who subsists essentially is the Holy Spirit. Indeed, what Matthew here calls kingdom another evangelist elsewhere calls Holy Spirit: "May your Holy Spirit come and purify us."¹³³

Here St. Maximus shows that the Father is the source of the Trinity: the Son is the name *of the Father*; the Spirit is the kingdom *of the Father*. Later in the same text, he says, "If he who always is, is always Father and King as well, then also the Son and Spirit always coexisted in essence with the Father. They [the Son and Holy Spirit] are by nature from him and in him beyond cause and understanding, but they are not after him as if they had come about subsequently as being caused by him."¹³⁴ Thus the Father, while not being the "cause" of the Persons in the sense that they come into being from the Father, since they exist eternally with the eternal Father, is nevertheless the source of the Persons insofar as they get their nature from the Father. St. Maximus makes this clear in the next few lines, "For relation (σχέσις) has the capacity of joint indications without at the same time allowing the terms of the relationship (σχέσις) to be thought of as coming one after the other."¹³⁵ This last passage is important in that it reveals the inherent relationality within the Trinity. As was seen in the Cappadocians, the Persons *are* relations. Again, St. Maximus makes the perichoretic or co-inhering relationality of the Godhead explicit in *Two*

¹³³ St Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, 106.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

Hundred Chapters on Theology and the Economy in the Flesh of the Son of God, Second Century ¶1:

There is one God because one Godhead, one, without beginning, simple and supersubstantial, without parts and undivided, identically monad and triad; entirely monad and entirely triad; wholly monad as to substance, and wholly triad as to hypostases. For the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the Godhead, and the Godhead is in Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The whole is in the whole Father and the whole Father is in the whole of it; the whole is in the Son and the whole Son is in the whole of it. And the whole is in the Holy Spirit and the whole Holy Spirit is in the whole of it. The whole is the Father and in the whole Father; and the whole Father is the whole of it. And the whole is the whole Son and the whole is in the whole Son and the whole Son is the whole of it, and the Son is in the whole of it. And the whole is the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is the whole of it and the whole Holy Spirit is in the whole of it. For neither is the Godhead partly in the Father nor is the Father partly God; nor is the Godhead partly in the Son nor the Son partly God; nor is the Godhead partly in the Holy Spirit nor the Holy Spirit partly God. For neither is the Godhead divisible nor are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit imperfectly God. Rather the whole and complete Godhead is entirely in the entire Father and wholly complete it is entirely in the entire Son; and wholly complete it is entirely in the entire Holy Spirit. For the whole Father is entirely in the whole Son and Holy Spirit, and the whole Son is entirely in the whole Father and Holy Spirit; and the whole Holy Spirit is entirely in the whole Father and Son. This is why there is only one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For there is one and the same essence, power, and act of the Father and Son and Holy Spirit, *and no one of them can exist or be conceived without the others*.¹³⁶ (emphasis added)

And in *Epistle 15*, he says:

Neither is the Son Father, but he is *what* the Father is, nor is the Spirit Son, but he is *what* the Son is; for the Son is all that the Father is, apart from unbegottenness, since he is begotten; and the Holy Spirit is all that the Son is, apart from begottenness, since he proceeds; while the unbegottenness, begottenness and procession do not sever the one nature and power of the inexpressible godhead into three unequal or equal essences or natures, but

¹³⁶ Ibid., 147–148.

characterize the persons or hypostases, in which or which the one godhead (i.e., the essence and nature) is.¹³⁷ (emphasis in the original)

St. Maximus thus takes over from the Cappadocians the Monarchy of the Father as well as the co-inhering perichoretic interrelationality of the Persons.

This continuity with the Cappadocians, and Dionysius as well, can further be seen in St. Maximus' understanding of the Trinity as both One and Three, both One and Many. The co-inherence of the Persons of the Trinity in the passage above already expresses both the unity and trinity of the Godhead. However, St. Maximus makes this more explicit. Again in the *Commentary on the Our Father*, St Maximus states, "We say and know that the same God is truly Unity and Trinity: Unity according to the principle of essence (οὐσίαν) and Trinity according to the mode of existence (ὑπαρξιν τρόπω). The same reality is wholly Unity without being divided by the Persons, and wholly Trinity without being confused in unity."¹³⁸ And in *Ambiguum* 1.3, he says, "The Trinity is truly a Monad, for such it is; and the Monad is truly a Trinity, for as such it subsists, since there is one Godhead that in essence is a Monad and in subsistence a Trinity."¹³⁹

Thus as Törönen explains, "Maximus makes it clear that Monad and Triad are a single reality. God, one and the same, is simultaneously *both* Monad *and* Triad"¹⁴⁰ (emphasis in the original). Further, in *Ambiguum* 26.2, citing St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Maximus asserts explicitly the relational manner of the Father's existence: "the name of 'Father' is neither

¹³⁷ Törönen's translation (Törönen, Melchisedec, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor* (London: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68).

¹³⁸ St Maximus the Confessor, *Maximus the Confessor: Selected Writings*, 111. The distinction between "essence" and "mode of existence" is an important one for understanding the distinction between the oneness of God and the multiplicity of Persons in St. Maximus. As Louth points out, "he [St Maximus] takes over from the Cappadocian Fathers one of their ways of explaining the difference between subsistent being (*hypostasis*) and nature in a Trinitarian context, and uses it much more widely: in fact, it becomes for him a fundamental metaphysical distinction.... In a Trinitarian context, Maximus will use these distinctions with some care." He then proceeds to demonstrate St. Maximus' use of the distinction in *Ambigua* 1. (Louth, Andrew, *Maximus the Confessor* (London: Routledge, 1996), 49–50.) However, it lies beyond our scope here to explore this in detail. For the concern here, it is sufficient to demonstrate the inherent and essential relationality which *is* the Trinity in St. Maximus.

¹³⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, trans. Nicholas Conostas, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 11.

¹⁴⁰ Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 62.

the name of an essence nor an activity, but rather of a relation.”¹⁴¹ From this, recalling that the relationality of the Father reciprocates and entails the relationality of the Son and that the relationality of the Spirit necessarily ensues thereon, the mutual interrelationality, the co-inherence, of the Trinity Itself follows. As can be seen then, St. Maximus the Confessor, in his Trinitarian understanding, follows teaching of the Cappadocians and Dionysius before him and affirms, as they did, the essential and perichoretic relationality of the Trinity. This is clear in the indistinct distinction of the Trinity’s Oneness and Threeness, as well as in the Monarchy of the Father which is both the source of the Trinity and the relational essence of the Trinity.

But, as is to be expected, this relationality extends to creation as well, and like Dionysius before him, St. Maximus explains this through his doctrine of the *λόγοι*. In *Ambiguum* 7 St. Maximus states,

From all eternity, He [God] contained within Himself the pre-existing *logoi* of created beings. When, in His goodwill, He formed out of nothing the substance of the visible and invisible worlds, He did so on the basis of these *logoi*. By His *word (logos)* and His *wisdom He created* and continues to create *all things*—universals as well as particulars—at the appropriate time. We believe, for example, that a *logos* of angels preceded and guided their creation; and the same holds true for each of the *beings and powers* that fill the world above us. A *logos* of human beings likewise preceded their creation, and—in order not to speak of particulars—a *logos* preceded the creation of everything that has received its being from God. We believe that He Himself, by virtue of His infinite transcendence, is ineffable and incomprehensible, and exists beyond all creation and beyond all the differences and distinctions which exist and can be conceived of within it. We also believe that this same One is manifested and multiplied in all the things that have their origin in Him, in a manner appropriate to the being of each, as befits His goodness. And *He recapitulates all things* in Himself, for it is owing to Him that all things exist and remain in existence, and it is from Him that all things came to be in a certain way, and for a certain reason, and (whether they are stationary or in motion) participate in God. For by virtue of the fact that all things have their being from God, they participate in God in a manner appropriate and proportionate to each, whether by intellect, by reason, by sensation, by vital motion, or by some essential faculty or habitual fitness, according to the great theologian, Dionysios the Areopagite. It follows,

¹⁴¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *On Difficulties in the Church Fathers: The Ambigua*, trans. Nicholas Constas, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 21.

then, that each of the intellective and rational beings, whether angels or men, insofar as it has been created in accordance with the *logos* that exists in and *with God*, is and is called a “portion of God,” precisely because of that *logos*, which, as we said, preexists in God.¹⁴² (emphases in the translation)

All things are created by God according to their λόγοι, and by their λόγοι, they participate in God and are a manifestation of God. Perl explains it thus: “Creatures participate in God, then, by their proper logoi, which are the self-multiplication of the Logos.... Here Maximus explicitly presents the idea of the logoi as the presence of God in each thing, the principle by which each creature participates in God in a differentiated manner.”¹⁴³ Further, as the “self-multiplication” of God the Λόγος, the λόγοι are in some sense identified with God the Λόγος. Sherwood notes, “The logoi preexist united in the Logos.... As preexistent in the Logos we are *portions of God*”¹⁴⁴ (emphasis in the original). The λόγοι cannot be the means by which we are “portions of God” if they are not somehow portions of God themselves. Gersh makes this explicit when, citing the passage just quoted, he calls the λόγοι “the Logos’ manifestation in creatures”.¹⁴⁵ On the other hand, however, they are distinct from God. As Loudovikos notes, “What is interesting about this position is the clear distinction it makes both between the *logoi* and the divine Word, and between the *logoi* and the things He created ‘in accordance with them.’”¹⁴⁶ The λόγοι seem, therefore, to be a sort of ontological middle ground between God and creation. They pre-exist in God, are united to God the

¹⁴² Ibid., 1: 95–97. We will focus on this *Ambiguum*, since, as Perl notes, “Maximus’ most complete exposition of his logoi-theory occurs in *Amb.* 7” (Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, 153).

¹⁴³ Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, 153–154.

¹⁴⁴ Sherwood, Polycarp, *The Earlier Ambigua of Saint Maximus the Confessor and His Refutation of Origenism* (Rome: Orbis Catholicus, 1955), 26. Not everyone accepts as literal the idea that created things are “portions of God”. See, for example, Louth (Louth, Andrew, “St. Maximus’ Doctrine of the *logoi* of Creation”, in *Studia Patristica*, ed. J. Baun, et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 82).

¹⁴⁵ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, 163.

¹⁴⁶ Loudovikos, Nikolaos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor’s Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, trans. Elizabeth Theokritoff (Brookline, Massachusetts: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010), 59.

Λόγος, and yet are distinct from God, existing in and as the principle of created things.

How is this distinct indistinction to be explained? While many scholars identify the λόγοι with the divine wills, purposes, and so on,¹⁴⁷ perhaps the most interesting and insightful recognition comes from Perl, who notes that the λόγοι are principles of differentiation: “the logoi are the ideas and wills of God according to which he creates all things, pre-existing uniformly in God the Logos and *dwelling in a differentiated manner in every created being*, providing each creature with both the fixed nature by which it exists and the divine goal or purpose which it should approach”¹⁴⁸ (emphasis added). Perl links St. Maximus’ λόγοι with “the ontology of participation”, which in turn is linked to St. Maximus’ doctrine of “constitutive difference”.¹⁴⁹ He cites *Opuscula Theologica et Polemica*, where St. Maximus defines difference as “constitutive and determinative of beings” and adds, “Every creature is in virtue of the differentia which distinguish it from other beings and make it to be what it is.”¹⁵⁰ He concludes by again citing St. Maximus *Ambiguum* 7, “For no created thing whatever is properly simple, because it is not ‘this’ or ‘that’ alone, but has constitutive and determinative difference considered with it as in a underlying substance, constituting it as that (αὐτο μὲν ἐκεῖνο συνιστῶσαν) and clearly distinguishing it from an other.”¹⁵¹ It has already been shown that to be determinate is to be related since to be determinate is to be distinct from some other, and so by defining beings in terms of differentia, in terms of being distinguished from an other, St. Maximus recognizes relationality in the essential being of created things, not only in that their being is grounded in their relation to God but also in the very nature of created things themselves through their λόγοι.

But the λόγοι are the basis of relationality in creatures in another way as well. By being the manifestation of God *in* things, they ground beings in

¹⁴⁷ See, for example, Törönen (Törönen, *Union and Distinction in the Thought of St. Maximus the Confessor*, 128), Loudovikos (Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor’s Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*, 66), Mitralaxis (Mitralaxis, Sotiris, *Ever-Moving Repose: A Contemporary Reading of Maximus the Confessor’s Theory of Time* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2017), 80), and Louth (Louth, “St. Maximus’ Doctrine of the *logoi* of Creation”, 82).

¹⁴⁸ Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, 147.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 147–148.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 148.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. (Perl’s translation).

the Trinity's relationality. It has already been seen that through the λόγοι, created beings are "portions of God", thus just as God is Relation, so also created beings are relational. By virtue of His tri-unity, God is and is not One and is and is not Many. This entails that God is distinct (i.e., Many) and indistinct (i.e., One) in Himself. As just shown, the λόγοι are a principle of difference in created beings, but they are a principle of difference which defines them, makes them a unity in themselves. Thus, by virtue of the λόγοι, created beings are themselves distinct and indistinct. They are distinct in their difference from other things and indistinct in their unity in themselves, in their wholeness which makes them what they are. In this way, created beings are shown to be reflections of God in the world.¹⁵² And just as God's relationality is reflected by His distinct/indistinct character, His One/Many nature, so also created beings reflect the relationality of God in themselves.

As regards the connection between λόγος as it appears here and the term λόγος in general, it is worth noting that ratio is, among other things, one of the possible definitions of the term, and so λόγος already carries relationality within its concept. In his discussion of St. Maximus, Mitralaxis also recognizes λόγος as "an inherently relational concept". He says,

The λόγος of an object speaks to us (λέγω), i.e., informs us of its identity, of its what-it-is, of its substance or nature (and of its how-it-is as well, of its particular actualization, of its hypostasis). The λόγος of something is its mode of communicating its existence and nature to us, the mode of its disclosure. Existence manifests itself as "logical" when its identity becomes a personal disclosure to a subject bearing the consciousness and personhood needed to actualize the relationality of this disclosure. In this sense, the Λόγος of God, the person of Christ, is the disclosure of God and the mode of God's disclosure, one of God's hypostases, i.e., actual realizations. The Λόγος of God informs us about God's identity as a Trinity of radical relationality and opens up the possibility of direct participation in the uncreated God's mode of existence.¹⁵³

¹⁵² I am not here suggesting that the conception of created beings as "portions of God" or "reflections of God" is limited to this understanding; however, this understanding is included in the concept.

¹⁵³ Mitralaxis, *Ever-Moving Repose: A Contemporary Reading of Maximus the Confessor's Theory of Time*, 80.

Although he does so on the basis of its disclosive nature, its relation to “speech” (λέγω) as communicative, Mitralaxis recognizes both the inherent relationality of λόγος as a concept and the relationality of λόγος in created beings as the same relationality that constitutes the nature of God. But the relationality of communication is not a pure relationality. It remains a πρὸς τι relationality grounded upon the relata of the thing communicating and the thing communicated to. The λόγοι in St. Maximus, however, do not manifest a merely πρὸς τι or external relationality; they rather manifest an inherent, pure, internal relationality in which relation is constitutive of the essential nature of both created beings and God. This inherent relationality of λόγος is evidenced in St. Maximus by its connection with God as Son. It has already been shown that God the Son entails relationality, and so it is not surprising that a relational concept like λόγος would be identified with the Son, especially given the already accepted identification of the Son with Λόγος.¹⁵⁴ By identifying the principle of created beings as λόγοι and connecting λόγοι with God the Λόγος, however, St. Maximus is recognizing the ontologically fundamental nature of relationality in both created beings and God.¹⁵⁵ This recognition continues in the Neoplatonic tradition with John Scottus Eriugena.

Eriugena

That Eriugena was familiar with the Christian tradition discussed to this point is uncontroversial. Eriugena knew the writings of the Cappadocians, Dionysius, and St. Maximus as has already been noted by Jeaneau mentioned earlier. Van Nieuwenhove goes further, however, noting not only that “he [Eriugena] knew Greek, and translated the complete works of Pseudo-Dionysius, the *Ambigua* and *Quaestiones ad Thallasicum* by Maximus the Confessor, and Gregory of Nyssa’s *De hominis opificio* [On the Making of Man]”, but also that “these authors had a major impact on Eriugena’s own thought, and he quotes extensively from their works in his

¹⁵⁴ See John 1:1–14

¹⁵⁵ St. Maximus’ doctrine of the λόγοι, along with its relation to the Λόγος, is far more complex and interesting than we have time to elaborate here. For a fuller treatment, see, for example, Perl, *Methexis: Creation, Incarnation, Deification in Saint Maximus the Confessor*, Louth, “St. Maximus’ Doctrine of the *logoi* of Creation”, Loudovikos, *A Eucharistic Ontology: Maximus the Confessor’s Eschatological Ontology of Being as Dialogical Reciprocity*.

own *Periphyseon*".¹⁵⁶ In fact, Gersh goes so far as to claim, "Eriugena is developing the doctrines of the Greek Christian Neoplatonists to their logical conclusion."¹⁵⁷ While this may be true, it is not the task here to trace the degree to which Eriugena incorporated and adapted the tradition. For the task at hand, it is sufficient to show that Eriugena's thought is in historical continuity with the thinkers before him and that Eriugena continues the relational ontology he inherited. To this end, we will, as with Dionysius and St. Maximus before, examine relationality in both his understanding of the Trinity and creation.

Beierwaltes notes,

Even though Eriugena's concept of the Trinity, especially in respect of its *unity*, is primarily determined by Dionysius, this in no way leads to the suppression of differentiation or distinction, or suppression of the non-reversible characteristic nature, individuality, and each particular personality of the three. On the contrary, this influence made possible an internally differentiated, relationally-moved conception of Trinity in Eriugena. Divine unity constitutes itself as creative thinking, willing and loving threeness (in the manner of self-explication). It comprehends and preserves itself as a whole. Thus, the Trinitarian unity may be understood as an internally moving and relational network which begets, creates or forms itself in an original self-unfolding.¹⁵⁸ (emphasis in the original)

He then cites *Periphyseon* II to show "the inner relationality [which] shows itself in the reciprocal *total* being-in-each-other of the three [Persons]"¹⁵⁹ (emphasis in the original):

the whole of the Father Who begets (is) in the whole of the Begotten Son, and the whole of the begotten Son is in the whole of the Father Who begets, and the whole of the Father Who begets and the whole of the begotten Son are in the whole of the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father through the Son, and the whole of the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from the Father through the Son (is) in the Father from Whom He proceeds and (in) the

¹⁵⁶ Van Nieuwenhove, Rik, *An Introduction to Medieval Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 56.

¹⁵⁷ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, 185.

¹⁵⁸ Beierwaltes, "Unity and Trinity in Dionysius and Eriugena", 10.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

Son through Whom He proceeds, and the Three are One through the Trinity understood in Unity.¹⁶⁰

Thus just as in the Cappadocians, Dionysius, and St. Maximus, the Persons reflect the relational co-inherence essential to the nature of the Trinity, the same is the case for Eriugena. In *Periphyseon* I, Eriugena goes yet further in identifying the Persons as relations: “they [i.e., the ‘holy theologians’, the Fathers of the Church] called the condition, <that is, the relation,> of the Unbegotten Substance to the Begotten Substance Father, the condition of the Begotten to the Unbegotten Substance Son, and the condition of the Proceeding Substance to the Unbegotten and to the Begotten Substance Holy Spirit.”¹⁶¹ Further, in order to explain what he means by this assertion, Eriugena cites St. Gregory of Nyssa’s reply to the Eunomians that “it [the name Father] was (the name) *neither* of a nature *nor* of an operation, but only of the relation to the Son”¹⁶² (emphasis in the original). Carabine recognizes that this relationality is a relationality inherent to all three Persons, not just the Father and Son: “He [Eriugena] concludes, not surprisingly, in agreement with Gregory of Nyssa, that the names ‘father,’ ‘son,’ and ‘spirit’ do not signify natures or operations but are relational.”¹⁶³

This relationality is not simply a relationality of Persons; rather it extends to the essence of the Godhead Itself. In *Periphyseon* I, Eriugena says,

The Divine Goodness is constituted in Three Substances of One Essence. And even this (truth) was discovered only in the light of spiritual understanding and rational investigation: for in contemplating, as far as the enlightenment of the Spirit of God would take them, the one and ineffable Cause of all things and the one simple and indivisible Principle they affirmed the Unity; and then by observing that this Unity did not consist in any singularity or barrenness they gained an understanding of *the Three Substances of the Unity, namely the Unbegotten and the Begotten and the Proceeding*.¹⁶⁴ (emphasis added)

¹⁶⁰ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, trans. I. P. Sheldon-Williams (Montreal: Éditions Bellarmin, 1987), 221.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁶² Ibid. For the quote from St. Gregory of Nyssa, see *Refutation of the Confession of Eunomius* (16.4–6), cited earlier.

¹⁶³ Carabine, Deirdre, *John Scottus Eriugena* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 52.

¹⁶⁴ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 43.

That the Three Substances, or Persons, are Substances *of the Unity* of God indicates that the unity of the Godhead consists of the Persons themselves, and if this is the case, then the relationality, which constitutes the essential nature of the Persons, extends to the very essence of the Godhead, that is, the Unity of God. Thus the substance of God is the Persons, and the Persons are the Substance of God. While this seems to follow necessarily, one might raise an objection. It might be claimed, “The Latin ‘*substantia*’ is a translation of the Greek and can be used to translate both ‘οὐσία’ (essence) and ‘ὑπόστασις’ (person), and the difficulty of translating into Latin what is expressed in the Greek simply causes the term ‘*substantia*’ to be used equivocally, and so it is simply a quirk of translation that causes the term to appear to be used univocally. Therefore, it is a misunderstanding to understand ‘substance’ as it relates to the ὑπόστασις of the Persons in the same way as ‘substance’ as it relates to the οὐσία of God. The difficulty of translating Greek into Latin is recognized by Eriugena in *Periphyseon* II:

God is Trinity and Unity, that is, three Substances in one Essence and one Essence in three Substances or Persons. For as the Greeks say μίαν οὐσίαν τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις or τρία πρόσωπα, that is, One Essence three Substances or three Persons, so the Romans (say) unam essentiam tres substantias or tres personas; but [they appear] *to differ* in that we do not find the Greeks saying μίαν ὑπόστασιν, that is, one Substance, whereas the Latins most frequently say unam substantiam tres personas. (The Greeks say) ὁμοούσιον ὁμοόγαθον ὁμόθεον, that is, of one essence, of one goodness, of one deity [or one essence, one goodness, one deity. *But* these terms which among the Greeks signify the indivisibility of the Divine Nature do not go easily into Roman speech, and never do so exactly, I think; and therefore their meaning is only translated in separate words by περίφρασις, so that their sense only is understood while the translation is not word for word].¹⁶⁵ (emphasis in the translation)

Nevertheless, this does not negate the point. While it may be the case that the imprecision of the Latin in translating the Greek leads to confusion in using the word “substance” to refer both to the essence of God

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 170. Kijewska cites this passage to show the influence of the current Christological and Trinitarian controversies on Eriugena’s discussion in *Periphyseon* II (Kijewska, Agnieszka, “The Conception of the First Cause in Book Two of John Scottus Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*”, *Annuario Filosofico* 44, no. 1 (2011): 42–43).

and to the Persons of God and so has no deeper significance, it should also be noted, as Eriugena does when he states “we do not find the Greeks saying μίαν ὑπόστασιν, that is, one Substance”, that the Greek word “ὑπόστασις”, which is translated “person”, originally meant “substance”. In fact, “sub-stance” is a literal translation of “ὑπό-στασις” (hyper-stasis), and both, understood literally, mean “under-stand”. So while terminological refinement by the Greeks eventually led to a clearer distinction between “οὐσία” and “ὑπόστασις”, such that “ὑπόστασις” no longer refers to the essence, or “οὐσία”, of the Godhead, yet even in the Greek, a subtle identification of the Persons and the Essence of the Godhead linguistically remains, if only as a faint trace.¹⁶⁶

Even if, however, this interpretation is too bold, and it is wrong to understand “substance” univocally in the phrases “one substance” and “three substances”, Eriugena clarifies the issue, further asserting that the Father is the essence of God/the Cause. In *Periphyseon* I Eriugena states, “Therefore the Cause and creative Nature of all things [i.e., God] is, and is wise, and lives. And from this those who search out the truth have handed down that in *its essence is understood the Father* in its wisdom the Son, in its life the Holy Ghost”¹⁶⁷ (emphasis added). Eriugena thus identifies the Father with the essence (*essentia*) of God, the Son with the Wisdom of God, and the Spirit with the Life of God. This identification is not accidental or random. It has a long tradition within the history of Christian thought.

That the Father is identified with the essence of the Godhead reflects the monarchy of the Father, which has already been demonstrated in the Cappadocians, Pseudo-Dionysius, and St. Maximus. The identification of the Son with the Wisdom of God has a long history as well. St. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 1:23–24, says, “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, *Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God*” (RSV—emphasis added). St. Athanasius, in the Orations Against the Arians, states, “The Creator and Author of all things is the Only-begotten [i.e., Christ, the Son

¹⁶⁶ Kijewska gives a more detailed explanation of the development of both the Greek “ὑπόστασις” and the Latin “substantia” in terms of defining the nature of God (Kijewska, “The Conception of the First Cause in Book Two of John Scottus Eriugena’s *Periphyseon*”, 43–44).

¹⁶⁷ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 42.

of God] and essential Wisdom of God.”¹⁶⁸ St. Justin Martyr, in the *Dialogue with Trypho* Ch. 129, identifies Wisdom, which is speaking in Proverb 8:22–25, with God the Son. While recounting his conversation with Trypho and his friends, he states:

“And the Book of Wisdom [Proverbs] says: ‘If I [Wisdom] should tell you the daily events, I would have to enumerate them from the beginning. The Lord made Me as the beginning of His ways for His works. From eternity He set Me up, in the beginning, before He made the earth, and before the fountains of water came forth, before the mountains were established; and before all the hills He begets Me.’” At this point I said, “Gentlemen, if you have followed me closely, you can see that Scripture declares that the Son was begotten of the Father before all creatures, and everybody will admit that the [S]on is numerically distinct from the Father.”¹⁶⁹

Origen, in *On First Principles* 1.2.1, asserts,

And therefore we have first to ascertain what the only-begotten Son of God is, seeing He is called by many different names, according to the circumstances and views of individuals. For *He is termed Wisdom*, according to the expression of Solomon: “The Lord created me—the beginning of His ways, and among His works, before He made any other thing; He founded me before the ages. In the beginning, before He formed the earth, before He brought forth the fountains of waters, before the mountains were made strong, before all the hills, He brought me forth.” He is also styled First-born, as the apostle has declared: “who is the first-born of every creature.” *The first-born, however, is not by nature a different person from the Wisdom, but one and the same.* Finally, the Apostle Paul says that “Christ (is) the power of God and the wisdom of God.”¹⁷⁰ (emphasis added)

¹⁶⁸ St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The Orations of St. Athanasius against the Arians* (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden & Welsh, 1893), 173.

¹⁶⁹ St. Justin Martyr, *St. Justin Martyr: The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho, Exhortation to the Greek, Discourse to the Greeks, The Monarchy or the Rule of God*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Thomas B. Falls, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1948), 348. The passage in Proverbs 8:22–25 is a continuation of Wisdom’s speech, which begins in Proverbs 8:12, “I, wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion” (RSV).

¹⁷⁰ Origen, *Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, 10 vols., vol. 4, the Ante-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885), 246.

In summary, as Waltke notes, “Beginning at least as early as the apologist Justin Martyr (A.D. 125), Christians, almost without exception, identified *Sophia* (the Greek equivalent of Heb. *hokmā*) in Proverbs 8 with Jesus Christ.”¹⁷¹ Finally, regarding the Holy Spirit, the Nicene Creed proclaims, “We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, *the Giver of Life*” (emphasis added). In *On the Holy Spirit Against the Followers of Macedonius* 19, St. Gregory of Nyssa says, “What gives life to the baptized is the Spirit; as our Lord Himself says in respect to Him with His own lips, ‘It is the Spirit that giveth life.’”¹⁷² St. John Chrysostom, in his *Discourse Against Judaizing Christians* 5.12.13, ends the fifth discourse, “And we shall receive it [our reward] by the grace and loving-kindness of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom and with whom be glory to the Father together *with the Holy Spirit, the giver of life*, now and forever, world without end. Amen”¹⁷³ (emphasis added). This association of the Spirit of God with life is also illustrated in Genesis 2:7, “The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*” (RSV—emphasis added). And in *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.7, St. John of Damascus identifies the Holy Spirit of God with breath,

It is further necessary that the Word have a Spirit. Thus, even our own speech is not devoid of breath, although in our case the breath is not of our substance. It is an inhaling and exhaling of the air which is breathed in and out for the sustainment of the body. It is this which on the occasion of articulation becomes the vocal expression of speech and evidences in itself the power of speech. Now, in the simple and uncompounded divine nature the existence of a Spirit of God is piously to be confessed, for the Word of God is no more deficient than our own word. It would be impious to reckon the Spirit as something foreign to God and later introduced from outside, as is the case with us who are compounded. On the contrary, it is as when we heard there was a Word of God and did not conceive of this as not being distinctly subsistent, or as accruing from learning, or as being expressed vocally and being diffused in the air and lost. Rather, we conceived of Him as substantially subsisting, endowed with will and operation, and all-powerful. In the same way, too, having learned that there is a Spirit of God, we con-

¹⁷¹ Waltke, Bruce K., *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 127.

¹⁷² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, etc.*, 5, 322.

¹⁷³ St. John Chrysostom, *Discourses against Judaizing Christians*, ed. Hermigild Dressler, trans. Paul W. Harkins, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1979), 145.

ceive of Him as associated with the Word and making the operation of the Word manifest. We do not conceive of Him as an impersonal breath of air, for the majesty of the divine nature would be reduced to low estate if its Spirit were likened to our own breath. Rather, we conceive of Him as a substantial power found in its own individuating personality, proceeding from the Father, coming to rest in the Word and declaring Him, not separated from God in essence or from the Word with whom it is associated, having might, not dissipated away into non-existence, but distinctly subsistent like the Word—living, endowed with will, self-moving, active, at all times willing good, exercising His power for the prosecution of every design in accordance with His will, without beginning and without end. For the Word fell short of the Father in nothing, and the Spirit did not fall short of the Word in anything.¹⁷⁴

St. John of Damascus makes the identification of the Holy Spirit with Life explicit in *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 1.8 when, mirroring the language of the Creed, he says, “We likewise believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and abides in the Son.”¹⁷⁵ Thus it is not mere happenstance or arbitrariness that led Eriugena to identify the Father with Essence, the Son with Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit with Life. In doing so, he is following the traditional understanding of the Persons of the Trinity.

But a question arises. In *Periphyseon* II, in responding to the question, “How if one should say that the Father and the Son are not two causes but the one indivisible Cause, since the Son Himself says: ‘I and the Father are one’?” Eriugena replies,

To this too must be given the answer: “The three Causes in the Divine Goodness which we are now discussing are sought not in the Essence, which is one and the same, but in the Trinity of Substances or Persons of that Essence.” For He is not confusing the duality of the Persons when He says: “I and the Father are one.” For He does not say: “I and the Father am,” but “are one,” showing the unity of the Essence as well as the difference of the Substances. And if He were to say: “I and the Father and the Spirit are one,” we should understand this not otherwise than as the Trinity of the three Substances subsisting in the Unity of the same Essence, and although we do not find this said, yet we understand that it is very true.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, 174–175. This is a natural identification, given that the Greek word “πνεῦμα” can be translated as both “breath” and “spirit”. (See Liddell, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 1424.)

¹⁷⁵ St. John of Damascus, *Writings*, 183.

¹⁷⁶ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 218–219.

Given that Eriugena here says the three Causes, that is, Persons, are explicitly not identified with the essence (*essentia*) of God, does this conflict with the earlier statement that “in its [God’s] essence (*essentia*) is understood the Father” and the identification there of the Father with God’s essence? There is no contradiction here. Eriugena is again following the tradition laid down by the Cappadocians. As was seen earlier, the Cappadocians established that the Father is the one God, and on this basis is established the monarchy of the Father as the source of the Trinity. As was shown in the discussion there, the Father is identified as God *and* one of the Persons of the Trinity, and at the same time, each Person, including the Son and Holy Spirit, are themselves also God, but not in the way the Father is. This paradox of the Father being the one God and the one God being a Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is not a contradiction, but rather the very basis of the ultimate ontological relationality which is the nature of God. So Eriugena is simply recognizing the traditional understanding of the monarchy of the Father.

The monarchy of the Father can also be seen in a passing comment made by Alumnus in *Periphyseon* II: “within the very Cause of all causes, I mean in the Trinity, there is understood (to be) some kind of precedence—for the Deity which begets and which sends forth is prior to the Deity which is begotten and the Deity which proceeds from the begetter and the begotten, although it is one indivisible Deity.”¹⁷⁷ Again, here is expressed both the monarchy of the Father, that is, the Father as the source of the

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 164. There are two points worth addressing here. First, the casualness with which this comment is made is striking. It is assumed that this idea of precedence among the Trinity is accepted, and it is used as a premise to explain the co-eternality with God of primordial causes. Eriugena does not seem to consider it controversial and so can assert it without argument. I could find no passage in *Periphyseon* which argued for or even explained this idea. This strongly implies that in his time, the monarchy of the Father was accepted as traditional orthodox Christian thinking on the Trinity. Second, one might be tempted to see subordination within the Trinity here, but the idea as it relates to the Trinity is one of logical sequence rather than temporal sequence or superiority, although when the principle is applied to the relation of God to the primordial causes it is used analogously to argue the superiority of God over the primordial causes even though the primordial causes have no beginning in time and so are co-eternal with God (562B). That in relation to the Trinity it is sequence and not subordination is made clear by Eriugena’s emphatic assertion that there is no divisibility (*inseparabilis*) within the Trinity. This indivisibility entails a unity and thereby equality among the Persons which would be undermined if one Person were subordinate to another. (Also see comments on 561B-C (*Periphyseon* (De Divisione Naturae), 163) cited below.) Both the issue of ranking within the Trinity and the monarchy of the Father are discussed in greater length in section “The Cappadocian Fathers”.

Trinity, and the ranking within the Trinity which follows upon the monarchy of the Father and is demonstrated by the Cappadocian Fathers. In his understanding, Eriugena is merely following the long-standing traditional understanding of the Trinity.¹⁷⁸ Carabine at least implicitly recognizes the monarchy of the Father in Eriugena when she, referencing *Periphyseon* II 600B, notes, “The [F]ather is the ‘cause of causes’.”¹⁷⁹ Thus the primordial ontological relationality which constitutes the nature of God from the Cappadocians through Pseudo-Dionysius and St. Maximus the Confessor clearly continues in the philosophy of Eriugena.¹⁸⁰

But what of creation? This relationality can be found in creatures as well. Just as all Neoplatonic ontologies entail that created beings only exist in relation to the First Principle insofar as the First Principle *is* the Being of created things—and so created beings must be inherently ontologically relational—the same is true in Eriugena. In *Periphyseon* V, after quoting

¹⁷⁸ One might wish to argue that at 455C the Father is identified with Being which is given to or in things, not the essence of God, while at 607C-D Eriugena is, in fact, talking about the inherent nature of God. While it might make sense for the Holy Spirit as Life to be understood as the Life which is given to living things, this does not hold for the Son understood as Wisdom, especially when compared to Wisdom as described in Proverbs 8. It would be strange and inconsistent if Eriugena were describing attributes of the Persons which are given to things when talking about the Father and Spirit but not the Son. Further, given the influence of the Cappadocians on Eriugena, it seems far more likely that this is precisely a recognition of the monarchy of the Father. The above explanation also fails to explain the reason for precedence within the Trinity Itself.

¹⁷⁹ Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, 52. 600A-B states: “N. There is, then, a substantial Cause (which is) unbegotten and begets; and *there is* a substantial Cause (which is) begotten (and does not beget); (and) also [there is] a substantial Cause which proceeds (and is not unbegotten nor begotten nor begetting); and the three (substantial) Causes are one, and one essential Cause. A. This is the necessary conclusion of the foregoing arguments. N. *Therefore* in the Universal Cause there is a preceding Cause and there are subsequent Causes.”

¹⁸⁰ While it is beyond the scope of the discussion here, the question of the *filioque* is not irrelevant to the inherent relationality of the Trinity, and so it is worth noting Eriugena’s view. He clearly rejects the idea of the Holy Spirit proceeding either from the Father and the Son as from two causes or from the Father and Son as from a single cause (this was the decree of the Council of Ferrara-Florence 1438–1445—see n. 422). He clearly emphasizes that the one cause is the Father. In II 609B-C, Eriugena says, “And although we believe and understand that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, we ought not to accept that the same Spirit has two causes, but one and the same Cause, namely the Father, both of the Son Who is born of Him and of the Holy Spirit Who proceeds from Him <through the Son>.” (John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (*De Divisione Naturae*), 220.) For a more detailed discussion on the question of the *filioque* as it relates to the nature of the Trinity, see n. 281.

Dionysius' claim, "the Divinity Which is beyond being is the being of all things", Eriugena continues, "Thus far Dionysius. But the Superessential Goodness bestows upon all things not only the gift of being, but also of eternal being. For every essence and substance derives its being and subsistence from no other source but the Superessential and Supersubstantial Goodness Which in Itself truly is and truly subsists. For there is no substantial or essential good which exists of itself save that alone by participation in which all things receive the gift of well-being."¹⁸¹ In *Periphyseon* I, he says, "In them [i.e., His creatures] He [i.e., God], without Whom they cannot be, is not only understood to be, but also is their Essence. 'For the Being of all things is the Divinity that is beyond being', as St. Dionysius says."¹⁸² And in *Periphyseon* III, "Therefore all things that exist participate in its [i.e., Divinity's] being—for the being of all things is the divinity that is beyond being."¹⁸³ Thus, as Beierwaltes notes,

That Being which is Being per se, the transcendent "Nothing of all", has also another aspect which is turned to "us" or to the "world". It is the *principium omnium*, the origin of everything besides Itself; it is the creator of Itself and of everything else. The unfolding of the absolute divine Nothingness *into Itself*... emerges as world by creating that world "out of nothing". Thus God is—as the constituting ground of all—all, without losing his absoluteness and without being absorbed into all.¹⁸⁴ (emphasis in the original)

In what way, though, is God the *principium omnium*, the principle of all things? Just as in Dionysius and St. Maximus, it is more complicated than God simply being the being of all things. As Gersh states,

The notion that God is related to his creatures in such a way that he represents their being or life is repeated by Maximus the Confessor in conjunction with his doctrine of the logoi embraced in Christ: "The being of each thing's virtue is the single Logos" (οὐσία τῆς ἐν ἐκάστῳ ἀρετῆς ὁ εἰς ὑπάρχειν Λόγος). Eriugena adopts the doctrine under the influence of both these sources, and in his writings occur frequent references to the Creator as the

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 575.

¹⁸² Ibid., 114.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 263.

¹⁸⁴ Beierwaltes, Werner, "Eriugena's Platonism", *Hermathena: Special Issue: The Heritage of Platonism*, no. 149 (1990): 61.

“being of all things” (*esse omnium*) or “life of all things” (*vita omnium*), the use of such terminology carrying the same implications with him as with earlier writers.¹⁸⁵

Instead, however, of the λόγοι found in Dionysius and St. Maximus, Eriugena posits “primordial causes”. Eriugena divides nature into four divisions: “first into that which creates and is not created, secondly into that which is created and also creates, thirdly into that which is created and does not create, while the fourth neither creates nor is created.”¹⁸⁶ The “primordial causes” are identified with the second division.¹⁸⁷ But, as Duclow notes, “the relation among these divisions unfolds as a complex interlocking dialectic. The uncreated nature creates the primordial causes, which in turn produce ‘those things known by generation in time and place [the third division of things created which do not create].’”¹⁸⁸ How does this dialectic work, and how is it related to both the Trinity and the nature of created things?

Citing Genesis 1, Eriugena states, “Understand that the first causes, which St. Dionysius calls the beginnings of all things, are signified by these words both in a general and in a special sense: ‘In the beginning God made heaven and earth’, that is: In His Word God created all at once the causes of the intelligible and of the sensible essences.”¹⁸⁹ From this passage, it seems that the primordial causes are the cause of the essences of created things and therefore *not* themselves the essences of created things. This is, however, misleading. In *Periphyseon* II, he explicitly calls the primordial causes “primordial essences”: “the task particularly commended to our attention, if God will aid us, is [to say something] concerning the procession of the creatures from the one First Cause of all things through *the primordial essences*”¹⁹⁰ (emphasis added). And in *Periphyseon* IV,

¹⁸⁵ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, 159.

¹⁸⁶ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (*De Divisione Naturae*), 25.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 (“the second to be the primordial causes” 442B).

¹⁸⁸ Duclow, Donald F., “Divine Nothingness and Self-Creation in John Scotus Eriugena”, *The Journal of Religion* 57, no. 2 (1977): 115. Regarding the identification of “those things known by generation in time and place” with the third division, see John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (*De Divisione Naturae*), 26. 442B.)

¹⁸⁹ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon* (*De Divisione Naturae*), 156.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 128.

Eriugena says, “Creative Wisdom, which is the Word of God, beholds all things which are made in It before they are made, and that very beholding of all things which are beheld before they are made is their true and eternal and immutable essence.”¹⁹¹ This apparent inconsistency in which the primordial causes are the essences of created things and at the same time the cause of the essences of created things is easily resolved by understanding the relation of the primordial causes to created things. The primordial causes are the primary essences of things, and so when they cause the individual created things, they create the essences in those things. The primordial cause *is* the essence of the created things which are formed upon it. Eriugena states, “The primordial causes, then [—as I had also said in what went before—] are what the Greeks call ἰδέαι that is, the eternal species or forms and immutable reasons after which and in which the visible and invisible world is formed and governed.”¹⁹² Thus created things—and their essences—are the manifestation of the primordial essences which the primordial causes are.

A question arises here: How can they be the cause of created things if God is the cause of created things? Eriugena explains:

It is not unreasonable that the action of the creature should be referred to Him from Whom every natural action originates, since even among the celestial essences, descending step by step from the first order which begins immediately after God to the last, whatever (ministration) the higher order performs and completes upon the order below it by some action of its own is wholly referred to Him from Whom every natural motion springs and every natural action descends from the highest to the lowest. For although the Cause of all things, being immutable, does not through itself but through the creature which is subordinate to it create (or) move (or) govern the totality of universal nature which it has established, yet the whole dispensation of the Divine Providence is referred to it because it is the Cause of all things.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 426.

¹⁹² Ibid., 228. The similarity to the Platonic Forms is unmistakable as Moran recognizes: “Thus, like the Platonic forms, they [the primordial causes] are eternal, immutable, supremely intelligible in themselves, existing through themselves (*per se esse*, II. 616b), and causes to all other things, which thereby participate in them. Eriugena does not actually say that the term *idea*, derives from Plato, but Honorius Augustodunensis does in his *Clavis physicae*.” (Moran, Dermot, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 263.)

¹⁹³ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 188.

The action of causing is referred to God in that God gives the primordial causes their capacity for action, for causation. In a sense, God delegates His creative power to the things He creates. How then are the primordial causes related to the Trinity? *Periphyseon* II states,

The divine word [Scripture] attributes to God the Father the property of creating natures in their causes.... But it (also) asserts that it is in the Word that the substantive reasons of things are created.... Finally, the distribution of all the causes which the Father created in His Word generically and essentially we find allotted by the [same] divine word to the Holy Spirit. For if to Him, as the Apostle witnesses, is given the sharing-out and distribution of divine gifts, why should He not also be given the division of the primordial causes (which are) substantially created in the Word of God?¹⁹⁴

And the passage from 615D, cited above, continues, “and therefore they [i.e., the primordial causes] were appropriately named by the wise men of the Greeks πρωτότυπα, that is, the principal exemplars which the Father made in the Son and divides and multiplies into their effects through the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹⁵ Gavin explains this process:

The primordial causes have their origin in the Father, the *source* of all things. This eternal establishment of all things in their unity takes place invisibly, since the cause still lack being, that is, they cannot yet be perceived or known by any intellect. The causes move from the inscrutable darkness of the Father to the light of God the Son, the Word. The Son is... the *receiver* of the hidden causes of the Father.... He receives the gift of the Father—the eternal reasons or causes—and gives this gift substance in himself. This movement from the Father to the Son should not be understood in terms of temporal succession, but rather as a logical perception of the priority in the unified substance of the Trinity: the Father is the *source*, the Son is the *receiver*. The substantive causes in the Word move from their hidden unity into the various species through the *distribution* of the Holy Spirit.... The Holy Spirit, therefore, is the *distributor* of the fruitfulness of the causes in the Word. Through the Spirit, the potential being of every essence finds its own voice.¹⁹⁶ (emphasis in the original)

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 165–166.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 228.

¹⁹⁶ Gavin, John F., *A Celtic Christology: The Incarnation According to John Scottus Eriugena* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014), 63–64.

More prosaically, O'Meara notes,

Each of the Substances (Persons) of the Trinity is said by the Scripture to have a special property: the Father, the making of things; the Word, the coming into being eternally in him of the primordial causes of things universally, essentially, and simply; the Holy Spirit, the distribution of the primordial causes made in the Son and the fertilization into their effects, into the genera, species, individuals, and differences, whether of the celestial essences, which are wholly without body or adhere to the very pure and spiritual bodies which are made from the simplicity of the general elements, or of the sensible beings of this visible world, whether of the universals or of the particulars.¹⁹⁷

So the Father creates the essences in the Son, and the essences are distributed to created things by the Holy Spirit, or in the words of Gavin, the Father is the Source, the Son is the Receiver, and the Holy Spirit is the Distributor.

But if the primordial causes are, as Eriugena described, “the eternal species or forms and immutable reasons” of created things, then when do the essences come to be *by* the Father *in* the Son and *through* the Holy Spirit? It cannot be in time, since the primordial causes, the “species or forms”, are eternal, and this entails that the essences of things, the primordial causes, be in God eternally, and so are “co-eternal” with God. Eriugena asserts, “So the principal causes of all things are co-eternal with God and with the Beginning in which they were made. For if God does not in any way precede the Beginning, that is, the Word begotten by Himself and from Himself, and the Word itself does not in any way precede the causes of things that are created in it, it follows that all these, I mean, God the Father and the Word and the causes created in it, are co-eternal.”¹⁹⁸ A problem arises. Above, in the discussion of the monarchy of the Father, Eriugena stated that there is “some kind of precedence (*quaedam praecessio*)” within the Trinity, and here he asserts that “God does not in any way precede (*nullo modo praecedit*) the Beginning”. How is this to be understood? The previous passage references the relation between the Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—but in this passage it is not the relation between the Persons Themselves, but the relation between God (*deus*) and a Person, that is, the Son. While there is *a kind of* precedence between

¹⁹⁷ O'Meara, John J., *Eriugena* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 98.

¹⁹⁸ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 163.

the Persons, there is no precedence between God and the Persons. In other words, there may be precedence, but there is no subordination.¹⁹⁹ A more difficult problem, and one which Eriugena addresses, is how the co-eternality of created things with God is to be understood. In Book III, Eriugena says, “it is not unreasonably predicated of them [the primordial causes], ‘There was not (a time) when they were not’, because they subsist always in the Word of God, in Whom they do not have a beginning of their being—for eternity is infinite—; and ‘there was (a time) when they were not’ because in time they began through generation to be that which they were not, that is, to become manifest in forms and species.”²⁰⁰ Carabine explains this as follows:

The causes were always as causes in the Word potentially, and at the same time they were not always because they flowed through generation into forms, species, places, and time. Therefore, they always were, and they began to be (P. III 665B–C). They can be said to be coeternal with God since they always subsist in God; they have no beginning in time, and yet they are not coeternal with God because they receive their beginning from the uncreated creator in the Word. Therefore, they can be understood as simultaneous with but not coessential with God (P. II 561D–562A). The father precedes the origins of the things made in the Word, and the Word precedes the things made because the maker always precedes the made (P. II 562B).²⁰¹

But it is not simply because the primordial causes receive a beginning in created things that they are not co-eternal with God the same way God is eternal in Himself. In Book II, Eriugena asserts,

Hence it follows that our reason for saying that the primordial causes of things are co-eternal with God is that they always subsist in God without any beginning in time, (and our reason for saying) that they are not in all respects co-eternal with God is that they receive the beginning of their being not from themselves but from their Creator. But the Creator Himself receives the beginning of His being from no one because He alone is true eternity,

¹⁹⁹This further supports the claim made in n. 177 that the “precedence” between the Persons does not entail subordination, since God does not precede any Person, even though the Father precedes the Son *in a certain way*.

²⁰⁰John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 289.

²⁰¹Carabine, *John Scottus Eriugena*, 54.

without any beginning and any end since He Himself is the Beginning of all things and their End.²⁰²

So more primordially, they are not eternal the way God is eternal because the primordial causes are not their own cause, as God is, but receive their Being from God. Gersh explains, "The primordial causes are co-eternal with the Son in that he was never without them, yet things made can never be in all respects co-eternal with their maker.... This rather involved doctrine is designed to show that the primordial causes are embraced within the Christ-Logos but that the Father's creation of them does not therefore imply a subordinationist view of the Trinity."²⁰³ To summarize, the Father eternally creates the primordial causes/essences in the Son, and the Holy Spirit distributes them, or creates things with them, by implanting the essences into created things.

This explains the relation of the primordial causes to the Trinity as regards their creation, but the relation goes much deeper ontologically. Not only are the primordial causes co-eternal with God, but they are also co-essential with God, that is, they are, in some sense, God. Both the primordial causes and God are identified with Goodness, Being, Wisdom, and Life. How is this so? It has already been shown that, according to Eriugena, the Father is the essence of God, the Son is the Wisdom of God, and the Holy Spirit is the Life of God, so God is Being, Wisdom, and Life in His nature. Additionally, God is characterized as Goodness. In Book II, Eriugena notes, "For their [the Persons of the Trinity] act is not other than their will, nor is there one will of the Father, another of the Son, another of the Holy Spirit, but one and the same will, one love of the *three Substances of the one essential Goodness*"²⁰⁴ (emphasis added). And, "For that in the Trinity of the Divine Goodness the Father is said to be (the father) of the Son and the Son (the son) of the Father under the form of relation."²⁰⁵ But also in Book II, the primordial causes/essences are said to be, among other things, Goodness, Being, Wisdom, and Life:

Therefore the primordial causes which the divine sages call the principles of all things are Goodness-through-itself, Being-through-itself, Life-through-

²⁰² John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 164.

²⁰³ Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena: An Investigation of the Prehistory and Evolution of the Pseudo-Dionysian Tradition*, 157 n. 147.

²⁰⁴ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 155.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 198–199.

itself, Wisdom-through-itself, Truth-through-itself, Intellect-through-itself, Reason-through-itself, Power-through-itself, Justice-through-itself, Health-through-itself, Magnitude-through-itself, Omnipotence-through-itself, Eternity-through-itself, Peace-through-itself, and all the powers and reasons which once and for all the Father made in the Son and after which the order of all things is woven from top to bottom, that is, from the intellectual creature which is next to God after God to the lowest order of all things in which bodies are contained. For whatever things are good are good by participation in the Good-through-itself, and whatever things subsist as beings and substances subsist by participation in Being-through-itself, whatever things are alive possess life by participation in Life-through-itself, similarly whatever things are wise and understanding and rational are wise and understanding and practice reason by participation in Wisdom-through-itself and Understanding-through-itself and Reason-through-itself. And the same applies to the rest. For there is not found in the nature of things any power, whether general or specific, which does not proceed by an ineffable participation from the primordial causes.²⁰⁶

This is further complicated by Eriugena's claim that rather than the primordial causes giving Goodness, Being, Wisdom, Life, and so on to things, it is God who gives these things: "Moreover upon every creature visible and invisible He bestows the gift of essence so that those things which possess only being should be, to living things the gift of life by which they live, to sentient things the gift of sense by which they perceive sensibly, to rational beings the gift of reason by which through the act of reasoning they inquire into and find out the natures of things truly and diligently, to intellectual beings the gift of intellect."²⁰⁷ How are these passages to be understood? God, the Cause, is Goodness, Being, Wisdom, and Life, and He bestows these qualities on all things through the primordial causes/essences which are "Goodness-through-itself, Being-through-itself, Life-through-itself, Wisdom-through-itself" by virtue of their participation in God. In the same passage in which Eriugena calls the primordial causes/essences "Goodness-through-itself, Being-through-itself, Life-through-itself, Wisdom-through-itself", he also notes, "They [the primordial causes/essences] are said to be the principles of all things because all things whatsoever that are perceived or understood whether in the visible or in the invisible creation subsist by participation in them,

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 229–230.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 166.

while they themselves *are participations* of the one Cause of all things, namely, the most high and holy Trinity; and they are said to be through themselves for the reason that no creature is interposed between them and the one Cause of all things”²⁰⁸ (emphasis in the original). Thus, the primordial causes do not simply participate *in* God, they are themselves participations *of* God.²⁰⁹ Thus, there is a downward flowing of creation: God creates the primordial causes in the Son. Here they are the primordial essences of all things. Then they create entities by the activity of the Holy Spirit distributing them into created things. From this creation can be seen as the activity of both God and the primordial causes.

Another question, however, arises. The primordial causes are the essences-through-themselves in that, as Eriugena notes, there is nothing between the essence and God. But this seems to be an insufficient explanation. How are they “through-themselves” by virtue of there being nothing between them and God? They should not be “through-themselves” but “through-God”. How is this to be understood? Both are true. They participate in God and are the participations of God, and they are the participation of created things in God. They are “through-themselves” in that insofar as they are the *essence* of Goodness/Being/Wisdom/Life, they *are* Goodness/Being/Wisdom/Life, and so they are Goodness/Being/Wisdom/Life through themselves. But this Goodness/Being/Wisdom/Life is God, and so they are Goodness/Being/Wisdom/Life though their participation in God. By being the essence of Goodness/Being/Wisdom/Life, which is God, their participation in God is a direct participation, unmediated by any other entity. Thus, there is nothing between them and God in that they participate directly in God, and so they can be the essence, the being-itself, of Goodness/Being/Wisdom/Life both being and not being God at the same time. They are what Eriugena calls “theophanies”. Eriugena explains, “That which is properly thought of as beyond all essence is also properly known in all essence, and

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 229.

²⁰⁹ In fairness, they are called many other things as well, as Moran points out (see Moran, *The Philosophy of John Scottus Eriugena*, 263). I emphasize “participations” and “essences” because these characterize the essential nature and activity of the primordial causes themselves, while other designations, it seems to me, either are virtual synonyms (e.g., “fundamenta principia” (fundamental principles) in 553A), emphasize their relation to the philosophical tradition (e.g., “ιδέαι” (ideas) and “πρωτότυπα” (prototypes) to the Greeks in 615D) or are explanations of the philosophical tradition (e.g., “exempla” (exemplars), “praedestinationes” (predestinations), “θεῖα θελήματα” (divine volitions) in 616A).

therefore every visible and invisible creature can be called a theophany, that is, a divine apparition.”²¹⁰ And further, “But the further the order of things descends downwards, the more manifestly does it reveal itself to the eyes of those who contemplate it, and therefore the forms and species of sensible things receive the name of ‘manifest theophanies’.”²¹¹ O’Meara explains,

God is created by himself in the primordial causes and becomes the beginning of all essence, of all life, of all intelligence; then, descending from the primordial causes which occupy a kind of intermediate position between God and the creature, he is made in their effects and is openly revealed in his theophanies; then he proceeds through the manifold forms of the effects to the lowest order of the whole of nature, in which bodies are contained; and thus going forth into all things in order, he makes all things and is made all in all things; and while he is made in all things he does not cease to be above all things and thus makes all things from nothing, that is, he produces from his superessentiality essences, from his supervitality lives, from his superintellectuality intellects, from the negation of all things which are and which are not the affirmations of all things which are and which are not. The nature of things is the Word of God.²¹²

Otten is more succinct. He describes Eriugena’s theory of theophanies as “the concrete manifestations of God in the visible world”.²¹³ And adds, “Eriugena introduced the concept of theophany to express the indefinable divine presence in the universe.”²¹⁴

For Eriugena, therefore, God is the Being of all things through participation both in Himself and in the primordial causes. And in this way, he gives being to all things. But in giving being, he gives His Being to all things, and in this way He becomes manifest in and through all things. All things become theophanies of God. Thus, all things are grounded ontologically in God who, being relational Himself, ontologically grounds all things in relationality. The primordial causes are the relation of things to God by virtue of being the participation of things in God. It is this relationality which makes created things what they are; it is their essence. Created things are ontologically relational: (1) in themselves (since their

²¹⁰ John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon (De Divisione Naturae)*, 308.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² O’Meara, *Eriugena*, 113.

²¹³ Otten, Willemien, *The Anthropology of Johannes Scottus Eriugena* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 217.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 214.

essence, i.e., what they are, is the primordial causes which, in turn, are relation/participation), (2) in the primordial causes (since these primordial causes/essences are the participation in God), and (3) in God (since He is their Goodness, Being, Life, Wisdom, etc.). From this the ontological relationality of both God, the Cause, the First Principle of Being, and created things becomes clear.

Nicholas of Cusa

In some ways, especially as it regards the Persons of the Trinity (particularly the Son and Holy Spirit), the relational aspect of Being is more obvious in Nicholas of Cusa than in the thinkers previously discussed. In *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, ch. 9, Cusa characterizes the Trinity in relational terms: "Our very holy doctors called Unity 'Father,' Equality 'Son,' and Connection 'Holy Spirit'".²¹⁵ Other than the term "unity" both other designations, "equality" and "connection" are obviously and necessarily relational. For Cusa, however, "unity" is relational as well.

As Cusa understands it, Unity is not a simple unity. Unity, as it relates to God, is not a distinct or numerical unity which is opposed to multiplicity. In *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, ch. 5, he states,

Unity, however, cannot be number, for number, which admits a greater, can in no way be either simply minimum or simply maximum; but because unity is minimum, it is the beginning of all number, and because it is maximum, it is the end of all number. Therefore, absolute unity, which has no opposite, is absolute maximumness itself, which is the blessed God. This unity, because it is maximum, cannot be multiplied for it is all that can be. It cannot, therefore, become number.²¹⁶

God is both the ultimate Maximum and the ultimate Minimum. Therefore this Unity is beyond number and is "all that can be" because this Unity, God, as both absolute Maximum and absolute Minimum, is above all opposition. In Book I, ch. 4, he states: "Oppositions, therefore, apply only to those things that admit a greater and a lesser, and they apply in different ways, but never to the absolutely maximum, for it is above all opposition."²¹⁷ This Unity is also not a unity understood by reason. In

²¹⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. H. Larence Bond, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 98. All English translations of Cusa are taken from Bond unless otherwise noted.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

Book I, ch. 24 of the same text, he says, “according to the movement of reason, plurality or multitude is opposed to unity. Hence, it is not a unity of this sort that properly applies to God, but the unity to which neither otherness nor plurality nor multiplicity is opposed.”²¹⁸ Thus, God is not the kind of unity typically understood by the term “One”; He is not a

²¹⁸Ibid., 121. An objection could be made here. Cusa notes, “Clearly, no name can properly apply to the maximum, for it is the simply maximum itself and has no opposite. When we impose names we do so out of a certain singleness of conception by which we distinguish one thing from another. But where all things are one, there can be no proper name. Hermes Trismegistus, therefore, is correct in saying: ‘Because God is the whole of things, no name is proper to God; for since in God’s simplicity God enfolds the whole of all things, it would be necessary either to assign every name to God or to call all things by God’s name’” (ibid.). How then can God be called “Unity”, “Equality”, and “Connection”? Cusa continues: “God’s proper name, which we say is ineffable and which is a tetragrammaton, that is, consisting of four letters, is proper to God, because it applies to God according to God’s own essence and not through any relation to creatures. Accordingly, God’s name should be understood as ‘One and All,’ or better, ‘All in One.’ Earlier, therefore, we learned of ‘maximum unity,’ which is the same as ‘All in One’; indeed ‘Unity’ seems an even closer and more appropriate name than ‘All in One’” (ibid.). It is in this context that Cusa says that God is not Unity as we understand Unity, but if He is not Unity as we understand unity, then He also is not Equality and Connection as we understand them. Since Equality is Equality with that Unity which is not commonly understood, then Equality is not something commonly understood—since it is the same as that which is not understood. And since Connection is the Connection between things not commonly understood and in connecting them is one with them, the Connection is not something commonly understood either—since its oneness with them entails its likeness to them. It is not that the names Unity, Equality, and Connection do not apply to God; rather it is that they apply in a way that is beyond our understanding. This is why he says all names of God are understood analogously, that is, “based on a relation to creatures (in respectu creaturarum fundatur)”. God is Unity, but a unity that transcends our understanding; God is Equality, but equality that transcends our understanding; God is Connection/Love but Connection/Love that transcends our understanding (for the identification of Connection with Love, see *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, ch. 9 (ibid., 98) as well as Book I, ch. 24, “God is Holy Spirit because God is the love of both [Father and Son]” (ibid., 123)). These names cannot be true definitions because a definition defines, it limits. And by being limited, it opposes something else cut off by that limit. This is what Cusa means when he says no name can apply because it has no opposite. It opposes nothing and therefore includes everything within it. Thus God truly is Unity and a unity which, as we will see, necessarily generates Equality and thereby Connection. But God is not absolutely beyond understanding. As Hoff notes, “The meaning of the word ‘God’ is not utterly inconceivable. God’s infinity is not an obscure darkness in which everything is indistinguishable. On the contrary, we know that he, and *only* he, exceeds all relativistic determinations and oppositions *by necessity*. At least in one respect the infinite is precisely conceivable. Hence, our ignorance of God is by no means unenlightened. Rather it has the character of a *docta ignorantia*, a *knowing* unknowing” (emphasis in the original) (Hoff, Johannes, *The Analogical Turn: Rethinking Modernity with Nicholas of Cusa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2013), 30).

unity, a one, which is *distinctly* one, a simple numerical unity. The unity of God is above all opposition, and since distinction is opposition, (since distinction is always a distinction against some opposing other), God, as Absolute Maximum *and* Absolute Minimum, transcends all distinction, opposition, otherness.²¹⁹ Thus, as transcending otherness, God is defined as “Not Other”. Cusa notes this explicitly in *On God as Not Other*. After pointing out that “Not Other” is self-defining, since it is simply *not other*, Cusa has the character Ferdinand assert,

Since all call the First Beginning *God*, you seem to intend for Him to be signified by the words “Not-other.” For we must maintain that the First is that which defines both itself and all others. For since there is not anything prior to the First and since the First is independent of everything posterior, assuredly it is defined only through itself. But since what is originated has nothing from itself but has from the Beginning whatever it is, assuredly the Beginning is the ground of being, or the definition, of what is originated. (emphasis in the translation)

To which Nicholas replies, “You understand me well.”²²⁰

Two things deserve recognition here. First, this “Not Other” is already relational in that the definition contains “Other” within it and thus is defined in relation, that is, in contrast, to an Other. And second, by containing Other within it, it contains all things. Thus, “Not Other” does not simply define Itself, but it also defines all other things. When Ferdinand asserts, “it is not yet evident that *Not-other* defines everything,” Cusa has Nicholas reply “Nothing is easier to recognize. For what would you answer if someone asked you, ‘What is *other*?’ Would you not reply, ‘Not other than other?’ Likewise, [if someone asked you] ‘What is the sky?’ you would reply, ‘Not other than the sky.’”²²¹ This unity of opposition within God is reflected in *On Learned Ignorance* as well. In Book I, ch. 4, Cusa says,

Therefore, because the absolutely maximum is absolutely and actually all that can be, and it is without opposition to such an extent that the minimum

²¹⁹For the detailed argument that the Absolute Maximum coincides with an Absolute Minimum, see *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, ch. 4.

²²⁰Cusa, Nicholas of, *On God as Not Other*, trans. Jasper Hopkins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 33.

²²¹Ibid.

coincides with the maximum, it is above all affirmation and all negation. It both is and is not all that is conceived to be, and it both is and is not all that is conceived not to be. But it is a “this” in such a way that it is all things, and it is all things in such a way that it is none of them, and it is a “this” maximally in such a way that it is also a “this” minimally. For the assertion that “God, who is absolute maximumness itself, is light” is no different than the assertion that “God is maximally light in such a way that God is minimally light.” Absolute maximumness could not be actually all possible things, unless it were infinite and the limit of all things and unable to be limited by any of them.²²²

This “maximum” then is a maximum which is “above all opposition”, but it is above all oppositions in such a way that it embraces all oppositions and thereby all things.

Several things indicate the essential relationality of this Unity. That this Unity is “above all opposition” and so is the “opposition of opposites” reveals God’s relationality in that He is characterized as “opposition”, albeit an “opposition without opposition”. In *On the Vision of God*, Cusa states explicitly that God is the “opposition of opposites” due to both His simplicity, that is, unity, and His infinity:

You, Lord, tell me that just as in unity otherness is without otherness because it is unity, so in infinity contradiction is without contradiction because it is infinity. Infinity is simplicity itself of all that are spoken; contradiction does not exist without otherness. Yet in simplicity otherness exists without otherness because it is simplicity Itself. For all that can be said of absolute simplicity coincides with it, because in absolute simplicity having is being. The opposition of opposites is an opposition without opposition, just as the end of finite things is an end without an end. You are, therefore, O God, the opposition of opposites, because you are infinite, and because you are infinite, you are infinity itself. In infinity the opposition of opposites is without opposition.²²³

This Unity is similarly relational in that it contains all opposition, contradiction, distinction, otherness within Itself, and is even, as was noted, denominated in relational terms as “Not Other”. Finally, it is relational in that relating is precisely what this Unity does in that it brings oppositions together in itself. Thus like Equality and Connection, Unity, as it relates to God, is a relational term for Cusa.

²²² Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 92.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 259.

Although Unity is relational, and so God Himself is inherently and essentially relational, it nevertheless merits further unpacking to explain how this relationality of God manifests itself. As just noted, Cusa designates God Himself as Unity, therefore by further identifying the Father as Unity, Cusa is continuing the traditional conception of the monarchy of the Father. Like the Cappadocians before him, Cusa, by identifying the Father with the Unity of God Himself, is identifying the Father as the essence of God. This identification of Unity, God, and Being is made explicit in *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, ch. 8: “Unity, or *ὄντας* so to speak, comes from the Greek *ὄν*, which in Latin is called *ens*, and unity is, as it were, being. In fact, God is the being of things, for God is the form of being and therefore is being.”²²⁴ But for Cusa, the relationality which was, for the Cappadocians, inherent in the Fatherhood of the Father, the Sonship of the Son, and the nature of the Holy Spirit as Spirit takes a somewhat different turn. The relationality, for Cusa, is grounded upon the nature of Unity Itself.

Cusa’s understanding of the relationship within the Trinity is laid out in *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, chs. 8 and 9. In discussing the generation of the Son, he states, “The generation of unity from unity is a single repetition of unity, that is, it is unity only once.... But unity repeated once begets only equality of unity, and this cannot be understood otherwise than that unity begets unity. And this generation is eternal.”²²⁵ Cusa here expresses the essential relationality of the Father (Unity) and the Son (Equality) in that they are equal and different. They are both Unity but Equality is a repetition of Unity. In the same passage, he describes it unequivocally as the relation between a father and a son: “generation is the repetition of unity or the multiplication of the same nature proceeding from a father (*patre*) to a son (*filium*).”²²⁶ Thus, the Son, as the repetition

²²⁴ Ibid., 96–97. Cusa’s etymology is certainly questionable here. There seems to be little etymological relation between the Greek participle for “being” and either the Greek or Latin word for “unity”. It is not our task, however, to critique Cusa’s etymology; rather it is to understand how he conceives of God and to show that his conception is ontologically relational. The Greek word “*ὄντας*” is also questionable. Given the association with the participle “*ὄν*” it should most likely be “*ὄντας*”, since “*ὄντας*” does not seem to be a legitimate form of the word. It could perhaps be an editorial error, since “*ὄντας*” is the word used in the Latin version found in *Werke*, while in the *Opera Omnia*, the word is “*ontitas*”, which also does not seem to be a Greek word. There is, however, a perhaps interesting connection to be made between the neuter masculine Greek word for “one” (*ἓν*) and the Latin nominative singular participle “*ens*” (to be). The etymological relation, however, seems extremely unlikely.

²²⁵ Ibid., 97.

²²⁶ Ibid. (translation emended).

of the Father, is Equality with the Father, and the Father, as that with which the Son is Equal, is one with the Son, and is therefore the Unity of the Son. In this way Cusa expresses the essential and ontological relationality which constitutes the essence of the Son as Equality and Father as Unity. But this unity of the Father together with the Son, this “connection” of both, is a third term: the Holy Spirit. Cusa notes,

As the generation of unity from unity is a single repetition of unity, so the procession from both is the unity of the repetition of this unity or, if you prefer, the unity of unity and of the equality of this unity. However, “procession” indicates a sort of extension from one thing to another; for example, when two things are equal, then a certain equality, which in some way joins and connects them, is, so to speak, extended from the one to the other. Therefore, it is correct to say that connection proceeds from unity and from equality of unity, for the connection is not of one of these only, but it proceeds from unity to equality of unity and from equality of unity to unity. Therefore, because the connection is, so to speak, extended from one to the other, it is rightly said to proceed from one to the other. But we are not saying that the connection is begotten from unity or from equality of unity, for the connection does not arise from unity through either repetition or multiplication. Although the equality of unity is begotten from unity and the connection proceeds from them both, nevertheless, unity, equality of unity, and the connection proceeding from both are one and the same....²²⁷

In the repetition of Unity, Unity generates Equality, and from Equality and Unity proceeds Connection. The three arise together necessarily. Cusa demonstrates this in *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, ch. 7, where he argues that Unity, Equality, and Connection must each be eternal, and since there can only be one eternity, they are one. He concludes:

It has been proved, therefore, that unity is eternal, equality eternal, and connection also eternal. But more than one eternal is not possible; for if there were more than one eternal, then since unity precedes all plurality, something would exist that by nature would be prior to eternity, which is impossible. Further, if there were more than one eternal, one eternal thing would lack the other, and so none of them would be perfect, and thus there would be something eternal that would not be eternal, because it would not be perfect. Since this is impossible, there cannot be more than one eternal. But because unity is eternal, equality eternal, and connection also eternal therefore, unity, equality, and connection are one.²²⁸

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., 96.

Since they are necessarily one, they necessarily exist together. This further entails that Unity generate Equality and Connection necessarily, as Cusa later notes in Book I, ch. 24: “For *because God is unity*, God is begetter and Father; because God is equality of unity, God is begotten or Son; and because God is their connection, God is Holy Spirit”²²⁹ (emphasis added). Because God is eternal, He has the inherent ability to create, and this entails that God in His Unity is creative. Cusa continues, “God from eternity was able to create things, even if God had not created them,... and if God were not able to make them, God would not be Father or Son or Holy Spirit—indeed, God would not be God.”²³⁰ Thus, just as God *qua* God must be creative, so God *qua* Unity must be creative. So it is God in His Unity which must generate the Son/Equality and the Holy Spirit/Connection.

The self-generation of God as Triune is also revealed in triple definition of God as *Not Other*. In *On God as Not Other*, Cusa has Nicholas assert: “the Beginning [God—First Principle], which is signified by ‘Not-other,’ defines itself. Therefore, let us behold its unfolded definition: viz., that Not-other is not other than Not-other. If the same thing repeated three times is the definition of the First, as you recognize (it to be), then assuredly the First is triune—and for no other reason than that it defines itself.”²³¹ Because God is defined as “Not Other”, and so defines Himself as “*Not Other is not other than Not Other*”, the self-definition is threefold and reveals the triune nature of what it defines. That God is *self*-defining as triune entails that He *self-generates* Himself as triune. In other words, that He defines Himself, and defines Himself as triune, entails necessarily that He generate His tri-unity, and this from Himself. The necessity of tri-unity entailed in the self-definition necessarily entails a triune self-generation.²³² *Not Other*, just as Unity, by its very nature, by its very definition, generates the Trinity. As Monaco notes,

the *non aliud* is the definition of himself and of all things. In fact not only is the *aliud non aliud quam aliud* [other is not other than other], but the

²²⁹ Ibid., 123.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Cusa, *On God as Not Other*, 47.

²³² It is worth noting here that I am not defending Cusa’s argument. Whether or not it works logically may be disputed. What is relevant to the task at hand is (1) that God, as Cusa understands Him, is a tri-unity, a unity that is necessarily both three and one, and (2) that Cusa does not merely assume or assert this, but rather makes an argument for it.

same *non aliud* [not-other] is *non aliud quam non aliud* [not other than not other]. The self-defining triple repetition of the *non-aliud* speaks of the untrinitarity of God, his being at one and the same time one and triune.... [H]e conceived the triple repetition of the *non aliud* as the self-constitutive process of God himself. The *non aliud* [not other] does not only show us the freedom and will of the Principle with regard to creation, and to created entities—expounding himself in his capacity to define all things—but rather also and above all, thanks to his triple self-defining repetition *non aliud est non aliud quam non aliud* [not other is not other than not other], the even more original and unfathomable freedom and will of the Principle to constitute himself, and to create himself.²³³

Thus, the tri-unity of God is revealed definitionally in *On God as Not Other*, and in *On Learned Ignorance* it is revealed ontologically by the essential generation of the Son/Equality from the Father/Unity, and the essential procession of the Holy Spirit/Connection from both.²³⁴ So as

²³³ Monaco, Davide, *Nicholas of Cusa: Trinity, Freedom and Dialogue* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2016), 73.

²³⁴ Here Cusa departs from Eriugena and the Cappadocians on the issue of the *filioque*. As we saw, Eriugena rejected the idea that the Spirit proceeds from both as from two causes and emphasized that the “cause” of the Spirit is the Father, although He does proceed “through” the Son. Cusa’s explanation of the Spirit being the Connection between Equality and Unity requires that the Spirit proceed from both as from a single cause, but entails that both are causes (even if in some sense a single cause) of the Spirit’s procession. One might object that this either undermines the monarchy of the Father by making the Son a cause of the Spirit’s procession, and so the Father cannot be said to be the source of the Trinity, or at least subordinates the Holy Spirit to the Father and Son. This may be true, and it may be a flaw in Cusa’s thought. It is not the purpose of this project to defend a particular thinker’s view or reconcile it with itself. The project here is only to examine and understand the implications of their views. That his arguments would support this understanding of the *filioque*, however, is not surprising. Cusa was a Latin delegate to the Council of Ferrara-Florence (1438–1445) which was an attempt to reconcile the differences between the Western and Eastern Churches, among which the *filioque* controversy was, as Siecienski notes, “the chief theological issue dividing the two Churches” (Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, 170). It ended in ostensible union between the two Churches, with the union decree, in regards to the *filioque* issue, stating: “The Holy Spirit is eternally from the Father and the Son, and has his essence and his subsistent being from the Father together with the Son, and proceeds from both eternally as from one principle and a single spiration. We declare that when holy doctors and fathers say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father through the Son, this bears the sense that thereby also the Son should be signified, according to the Greeks indeed as cause, and according to the Latins as principle of the subsistence of the Holy Spirit, just like the Father. We define also that the explanation of those words ‘and from the Son’ was licitly and reasonably added to the creed for the sake of declaring the truth and from imminent need” (*Laetentur Caeli* as quoted in Siecienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, p. 170).

Cusa states in *On Learned Ignorance* Book II, ch. 7, “Absolute unity is necessarily threefold,... for absolute unity is not other than trinity.”²³⁵

One might argue that Cusa’s relationality is not a Pure Relationality, rather it is still a *πρός τι* relationality in which relation is grounded upon two relata. This would make sense, since equality and connection require other entities to be equal to and connected with; however, Cusa is more complicated than this. The Son *is* Equality; the Holy Spirit *is* Connection. And because Unity/God is Himself relation, Equality with this Unity is *in itself* relational; Connection between Unity and Equality, as a union of Unity and Equality, is *in itself* relational. This is not, therefore, a *πρός τι* relationality, but rather the essential pure self-relationality of the Trinity Itself. Further, just as for the previously examined thinkers the Trinity Itself entails relationality as a One and Three in which each of the Three is the whole One while the One is yet Three, so too for Cusa is this the case. In *On Learned Ignorance* Book II, ch. 7, he says, “In God... it is not as a whole exists in its parts or as a universal in the particulars, but the unity itself is a trinity. Therefore, each of the persons is the unity, and because the unity is a trinity, one person is not another.”²³⁶ Thus, Cusa’s understanding of the Trinity/God does entail a Pure Relation which is ontologically prior to relata.

From the above it can be seen how the First Principle, God, must be relational for Cusa. But does the same apply to creatures? For Being to be relational, the Being of creatures must also be relational. For Dionysius and St. Maximus, the relationality of creatures derives from λόγοι which

²³⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 144. The self-generating necessity of the Trinity can be further demonstrated as follows. If there were no connection between Equality and Unity, then there could be no Equality, since there would be nothing connecting Equality and Unity together. They would either be two radically distinct things, in which case there could be no Equality because there would be no relation to another for Equality to be equal to (since they are so extremely distinct that they are completely unrelated to each other and so one is not equal to the other), or dissolve into a radically undifferentiated unity in which there would be no equality, since there would be nothing that is equal. Thus, there must be a Connection between Equality and Unity for there to be Equality at all. It is worth noting that this also entails that the first plurality is Three, not Two. Two cannot exist prior to Three, since as long as there are only Two, then there is no relation between the two unities to differentiate them. As just noted, they either dissolve into unity or are so radically independent that they are not two unities but a single unity unto themselves (which is the same as dissolving into unity). This also reflects the earlier argument from Chap. 1, section “The Problem”.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 144–145.

are manifestations of the Λόγος of the Son. For Eriugena, like Dionysius and St. Maximus before him, it comes through the Son, but through “primordial causes” which are created in the Son and distributed by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, for Cusa the being of creatures also comes through the Son. In *On Learned Ignorance* Book II, ch 9, Cusa says, “it is only in their contracted existence that the forms of things are distinct; as they exist absolutely they are one indistinct form, which is the Word of God.”²³⁷ So created things are manifestations of God insofar as they find their essence, their form, in the Son. In this way the Son is the paradigm of created things. Hopkins explains, “all things (i.e., all essences and forms) are present eternally and incorruptibly in God as the most simple and incomposite Word of God Himself, who may be called Divine Exemplar and World-soul.”²³⁸

This is, however, much more complex for Cusa. Creation results from the entirety of God’s activity and is not simply a reflection of the Son. In *On Learned Ignorance* Book I, ch. 24, he says,

God is Son because God is the equality of the being of the things that God was able to make.... If, therefore, you consider this more closely, you will see that for the Father to beget the Son was to create all things in the Word.... God, therefore, is Father because God begets equality of unity, but God is Holy Spirit because God is the love of both. And God is all—the unity, the equality of unity, and the love—in relation to creatures. For a creature first comes into being because God is Father; it is perfected because God is Son; and it is in harmony with the universal order of things because God is Holy Spirit. And in each thing these are vestiges of the Trinity.²³⁹

In this passage, the very intricate and intimate relation between God and creation is revealed. God does not simply manifest Himself as Father/Unity, Son/Equality, and Holy Spirit/Connection/Love, but as was seen above, God’s Trinitarian nature is His capacity to create. If God were not triune, He could not create. Thus, His creative capacity entails His tri-unity. This first manifests itself in that God’s begetting of Equality is not simply the begetting of the Son. But, as Cusa notes above, the begetting of the Son/Equality at the same time the begetting of “the

²³⁷ Ibid., 153.

²³⁸ Hopkins, Jasper, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction* (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 1983), 105.

²³⁹ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 123.

equality of the being of the things that God was able to make". Thus, because God is Father, He creates things. Because the Son is the paradigm of created entities created things find their perfection in the Son. Just as for Eriugena, for whom the generation of the Word at the same time entails the creation of the primordial causes since the primordial causes always existed in the Word and so are co-eternal with God,²⁴⁰ so also for Cusa the begetting of the Son is the creation "of all things in the Word".

It is clear how created things exist because God is Father, and it is also clear how they are perfected because God is Son, but how do created things manifest harmony with the universal order because God is Holy Spirit? It is because the Holy Spirit is the harmony, the connection, the love, between Father and Son that the harmony of created things with the universal order is a result of the Holy Spirit. But how do created things reflect this divine harmony? In one sense the answer is obvious: because created things are "contractions" of the Son/Word and so are manifestation of God, and because the Son causes, along with the Father, the Connection between Father and Son, as manifestations of the Son created things must inherently reflect the harmony between Father and Son. But in order to understand this better, it is necessary to understand what Cusa means by the term "contraction".

In *On Learned Ignorance* Book II, ch. 4, Cusa says, "Contraction signifies contraction to something so as to be this or that."²⁴¹ Elsewhere in *On Learned Ignorance*, it is described as a "falling short": Book II, ch. 2 says, "Because they [created things] cannot be the maximum [God], they are diminished, other, distinct, and so on."²⁴² And Book II, ch. 4 says, "For contracted infinity, or simplicity, or indistinction, in virtue of its contraction, falls infinitely lower than that which is absolute".²⁴³ From this it can be seen that contraction is a particularizing of the absolute; it is God, as Absolute Maximum and Absolute Unity, unfolding into particular things. Cusa describes the Absolute Maximum as that which enfolds all things unfolding them from Itself. Book II, ch. 3 explains,

But the maximum is that to which nothing can be opposed and that in which the minimum is the maximum. Infinite unity, therefore, is the enfold-

²⁴⁰ See *Periphyseon* III 665B-C quoted earlier.

²⁴¹ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 139.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 131–132.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 138.

ing of all things; indeed, “unity,” which unites all, designates this. Unity is maximum not merely because it is the enfolding of number but also because it is the enfolding of all things. And just as only unity is found in number, which is the unfolding of unity, so only the maximum is found in all existing things.²⁴⁴

And later, “This is the case even if you do know that God is the enfolding and unfolding of all things, that, as God is the enfolding, in God all things are God, and that, as God is the unfolding, God is in all things that which they are, like the truth in an image.”²⁴⁵ This contracting/unfolding is such that God remains in the contracted, not fully but, as Cusa says, “like the truth in an image”. In this way created things are theophanies. They are “vestiges of the Trinity”. They are what Hudson calls “a divine self-manifestation in creation”, “an act of intimate self-expression in which the divine never abandons the created order to its own independent existence”.²⁴⁶ Thus, as is always to be expected in a Neoplatonic system, created things are manifestations of the First Principle.

So by reflecting God created things reflect the inherent harmony within God; they are the unfolding of God into the universe. Thus, as God’s unfolding of Himself, they are not simply harmonious with the universe, rather they are manifestations of God’s own harmony, His own Connection within Himself. So in one sense, created things reflect the harmony of the universal order in that they reflect the Trinity Itself. But this too is more complex. They reflect the universal order also in that created things are not merely contractions of God, they are also contractions of the universe itself, and so as contraction of the universe, they reflect the harmony within the universe. How is this the case?

The first contraction is the universe itself. In Book II, ch. 4, Cusa states, “the world or universe is a contracted maximum and a contracted ‘one’; it precedes contracted opposites, that is, contraries; and it is contractedly that which all things are. In all things it is the contracted beginning and the contracted end of things, a contracted being and a contracted infinity, so that it is contractedly infinite. In it all things are, with contracted simplicity

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 134.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 137.

²⁴⁶ Hudson, Nancy, “Divine Immanence: Nicholas of Cusa’s Understanding of Theophany and the Retrieval of a ‘New Model’ of God”, *The Journal of Theological Studies The New Series* 56, no. 2 (2005): 451, 452. For a more nuanced, if not contradictory, view, see Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, 97ff.

and indistinction and without plurality, the contracted maximum.”²⁴⁷ And later in the same chapter, “Since we have said that *the universe is only the contracted first*, and in this respect a maximum, clearly the whole universe came forth into being by a simple emanation of the contracted maximum from the absolute maximum”²⁴⁸ (emphasis added). So the universe is the first contraction which contains all things within it. But this “first” is not a temporal first. Cusa continues the same passage, “But all the beings that are parts of the universe, without which the universe, because it is contracted, could not be one, whole, and perfect, came forth into being together with the universe.”²⁴⁹ In Book II, ch. 5, Cusa sums up the entire relation between God, the universe, and created things as follows:

The universe, as most perfect, has preceded all things in the order of nature, as it were, so that it could be each thing in each thing....The universe is in things only in a contracted way, and every actually existing thing contracts all things so that they are actually that which it is. But everything that actually exists is in God, for God is the actuality of all things. Actuality is the perfection and the end of potentiality. Since the universe is contracted in each actually existing thing, it is obvious that God, who is in the universe, is in each thing and each actually existing thing is immediately in God, as is the universe. Therefore, to say that “each thing is in each thing” is not other than to say that “through all things God is in all things” and that “through all things all are in God.”²⁵⁰

All things are connected in and through all things as cascading contractions of God. God contracts into the universe, and the universe contracts into created things, and in so doing, all things are in each thing as God is in all things and all things are in God. All things are in universal harmony not only because they reflect the image of the Trinity, but because all things are in all things and in God and vice versa. But this is an ontological harmony. Things have their very being in their relation to other things through contraction, thus, their very being is ontologically relational. So just as the Holy Spirit is the Connection within God, so the Connection within God is reflected in the connection within the universe, which created things form.

To understand the intricate and complex relationality and deeply triune nature of Cusa’s universe, it would be beneficial to understand the process

²⁴⁷ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 138.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

of contraction in a bit more detail. As Cusa notes in Book II, ch. 7, “contraction is impossible without that which is contractible, that which contracts, and the connection that is accomplished by the common actuality of the other two.”²⁵¹ So contraction requires three elements: the contractible, that which contracts, and the connection between the two. From this the triple or triune nature of the contracted universe begins to become manifest. Cusa goes on:

Contractibility denotes a certain possibility, and this possibility descends from the procreating unity in God, as otherness descends from unity. For such possibility means changeableness and difference, since its meaning is in regard to a beginning. It seems that nothing precedes possibility, for how would anything exist if it had not been possible? Possibility, then, descends from eternal unity. However, that which does the contracting descends from equality of unity, for it sets a limit to the possibility of that which is contractible. Equality of unity, to be sure, is equality of being, for being and one are convertible. Consequently, since that which contracts is that which equalizes the possibility for being one thing or another contractedly, it is correct to say that it descends from equality of being, which in God is the Word. And because the Word, which is the essence, idea, and absolute necessity of things, necessitates and restricts possibility through such a contracting agent, some, therefore, called that which contracts “form” or “soul of the world” and they called possibility “matter”²⁵²

Thus, “contractibility” is matter which is possibility, and “that which contracts” is form, the essences of things, which is, ultimately, the Word/the Son. And just as “form” is the Son/Word, so also matter/possibility is God. Because absolute possibility is nothing it cannot be by itself. Thus in Book II, ch. 8, Cusa states, “We, however, discovered through learned ignorance that it would be impossible for absolute possibility to be. For among possibles nothing can be less than absolute possibility, which comes nearest to not-being....Therefore, in God absolute possibility is God, but outside God it is not possible.”²⁵³ And in Book II, ch. 9, Cusa states, “Therefore, forms do not have actual existence except (1) in the Word as Word and (2) contractedly in things.”²⁵⁴ So both form and matter find their actual being only in God. This is not surprising. Since God as

²⁵¹ Ibid., 145.

²⁵² Ibid.

²⁵³ Ibid., 148.

²⁵⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, trans. Jasper Hopkins, vol. I (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2001), 86.

Absolute Unity contains all opposites, He also contains both absolute possibility (matter) and absolute actuality (form), but since possibility, by itself, is nothing, and form, by itself, is the Word, both only truly exist in God. While Form in itself is the Word and Matter in itself is nothing, in contraction, both Form and Matter come together to constitute created things. Matter, as that which is contractible, occasions contracted things once Form contracts it.²⁵⁵ Created things, then, are the result of matter, the contractible, being contracted by form, that which contracts.

²⁵⁵ We do not have time to fully examine the implications here, but the notion that matter is “nothing” in itself provides interesting paths of speculation on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Since matter, in its absolute being, only exists in God, it might be possible that creation *ex nihilo* simply reflects God creating the universe from Himself. Given the intimate relation between creation of the universe and the self-generation of God in the Trinity, this might not be too far amiss. In discussing how God creates *ex nihilo*, Cusa says in *Apologia Docta Ignorantiae*, “Nor is it true, if God is everything which is, that He did not therefore create all things from nothing. For since God alone is the enfolding of all the being of every existent: in creating, He unfolded heaven and earth. Or better, since God is, by way of enfolding and in an intellectually divine manner, all things: He is the Unfolder of all things, the Creator of all things, the Maker of all things—and whatever else can be said concerning this [point]. This is the way the great Dionysius argues” (ibid., 480). If God unfolds all things which He enfolds, and this unfolding is the act of creation, then understanding creation *ex nihilo*, as Cusa seems to do, as God creating “from Himself”, seems reasonable. It then further seems reasonable to understand Cusa’s account of creation *ex nihilo* as God contracting Absolute Matter—which is in itself nothing and which is enfolded in Him—by means of the Holy Spirit bringing the Absolute Form, the Son/Word, into connection with Absolute Matter which is enfolded in God. So perhaps, in some sense, the Holy Spirit uniting the Father and Son is the same act as the Holy Spirit bringing, or connecting, form to matter, uniting form in matter, and thus bringing contraction about, thus bringing about creation *ex nihilo*, creation out of the nothingness of matter. However, as Hopkins subtly but importantly points out, created things, as contractions of God, are not God contracted. God cannot be contracted (Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, 102). As Cusa notes in *De Visione Dei* ch. 13, “the Infinite is not contractible but remains absolute. If the Infinite were contractible away from Infinity, it would not be the Infinite” (Nicholas of Cusa, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, vol. II (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Banning Press, 2001), 706). So created things cannot be God contracted; they are instead, as Hudson notes above, *manifestations* of God, or as Hopkins notes, “likenesses” of God, “resemblances” of God. They are “theophanies”, appearances of God. (For a deeper discussion of this point, see Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, 97ff.) It should be noted, nevertheless, that whether created things are “likenesses” of God or instances of God contracted, neither affects the argument here regarding their ontological relationality. If their relationality is simply a reflection of God’s relationality or is itself God’s relationality, relationality is ontologically primordial in either case. Hopkins’ concern is, rightly, the problem of pantheism, and in this light, I agree with his reading of Cusa that God does not contract, so the contraction which constitutes the essence of created things is a manifestation or likeness of God rather than God Himself.

But what about the third element, the connection of the two? In Book II, ch. 7, Cusa says,

Finally, there is the connection of that which contracts and that which is contractible, of matter and form, or of possibility and the necessity of connection, and this is actually brought about as if by a spirit of love uniting them through a certain motion. And certain ones were accustomed to calling this connection determined possibility, because the possibility of being is determined toward actually being this or that through the union of the determining form and the determinable matter. But it is evident that this connection descends from the Holy Spirit, who is the infinite connection.²⁵⁶

How, though, does love connect form and matter? This becomes clear upon closer examination of the nature of matter. In Book II, ch. 8, Cusa states,

Because it [absolute possibility/Matter] lacks all form, the Platonists spoke of it as “lack.” And because it lacks, it desires [*appetit*], and because it obeys necessity, which commands it or brings it to actual being, just as wax obeys the artisan who wishes to make something from it, it is aptitude. But formlessness proceeds from lack and aptitude and connects them, so that absolute possibility is, as it were, three without compounding, since lack, aptitude, and formlessness cannot be its parts; otherwise, something would be prior to absolute possibility, which is impossible.²⁵⁷

Two things are worth noting here. First, matter is a tri-unity for Cusa. It is three (lack, aptitude, and formlessness) which are not and cannot be parts. So it is one and three. Thus, it participates in the Trinity of God. Second, because Matter is Lack, it desires. The Latin *appetit*, from which comes the English “appetite”, indicates a strong desire, to eagerly long for.²⁵⁸ It is a short leap, if leap at all, from desire to love.²⁵⁹ But what does it desire? What does it lack? It lacks form. Thus, as Cusa notes, necessity, the necessity of love/desire brings it to “actual being”; it brings it to form. Thus, the third element along with matter and form is connection/love.

²⁵⁶ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 146.

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 147.

²⁵⁸ Lewis, Charlton T. and Short, Charles, ed. *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 141–142.

²⁵⁹ For the Greeks this is no leap at all. Their word “ἔρως” means both love and desire (see Liddell, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 691).

It is connection which brings matter and form together and unites them. Thus, created things reflect, they participate in, the Triune nature of God in that they exist in a tri-unity of matter, form, and connection. So the inherent relationality not only of God but of the universe of created things becomes manifest. In Book II, ch. 7, Cusa states, “Therefore, the oneness of the universe is three, since it is from possibility, connecting necessity, and union—which can be called possibility [matter], actuality [form], and union.”²⁶⁰ And by participating in God’s tri-unity, in God’s internal relational harmony, the universe and the created things in it exist in “harmony with the universal order”, which arises because, as Cusa says, God is Holy Spirit.

As has been seen, not only are the universe and created things relational in that they are triune and exist only in the relation of matter, form, and connection, but matter, form, and connection are each relational as well. Matter is triune, being constituted by Lack, Aptitude, and Formless which are one, since they are not parts of matter, and yet three. In addition, matter only exists in relation with form, when contracted by form. Apart from form, in itself, matter is nothing. Form, though, only exists in relation to matter, by contracting matter. In itself, apart from its contracting matter, form is the Son/Word, Equality, Who is the Essence/Form of things. And finally, connection only exists by connecting form and matter. It itself is the Holy Spirit/Connection/Love. From what has been said then, the primordial ontological relationality of both God and creation should be clear. The discussion would be incomplete, however, if it ended here. An even more profound manifestation of the relationality between God and the world can be seen in Christ as the Contracted Maximum.

In Book III, Cusa discusses the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, which asserts that God, the Creator, became a creature, a human being. Cusa understands this in terms of Christ as the Contracted Maximum. In Book III, ch. 2, he states, “The absolutely maximum [God] is absolutely actually all possible things and thus is absolutely most infinite. Likewise, a maximum contracted to a genus or species is, in accord with the given contraction, actually all possible perfection. In this contraction, the maximum, because a greater cannot be given, is infinite and embraces the whole nature of the given contraction.”²⁶¹ Because the contracted

²⁶⁰ Nicholas of Cusa, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, I, 77.

²⁶¹ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 173.

maximum contains all things and is the genus or species of all things, it is the perfection of all things. Since, Cusa continues,

it follows, therefore, that if anything that could be posited were as the maximum contracted individual of some species, such a thing would have to be the fullness of that genus and species so that in the fullness of perfection it would be the way, the form, the essence, and the truth of all the things that would be possible in the species. Such a contracted maximum, existing above the whole nature of that contraction as its final term and enfolding in itself the whole perfection of that contraction, would hold, above all proportion, the highest equality with every given thing in that species, so that it would be neither too great nor too small for anything but would enfold in its fullness the perfections of all the things in the species. Thus, it is clear that the contracted maximum cannot exist as purely contracted, since no such contracted thing could attain the fullness of perfection in the genus of its contraction.²⁶²

As the perfection of all things in their fullness, this contracted maximum cannot be purely contracted, but this entails that it must be God, since only God is non-contracted; but neither can it simply be God, as Cusa goes on, “nor would such a contracted thing be God, who is most absolute, but the contracted maximum, that is, God and creature, would have to be both absolute and also contracted by a contraction that could exist in itself only by existing in absolute maximumness.... We would have to conceive of this as God in such a way that it is also creature and as creature in such a way that it is also God, as both creator and creature without confusion and without composition.”²⁶³ Thus, this Contracted Maximum must be both God and creature. Further, since the Absolute Maximum is Absolute Unity, this Contracted Maximum must also be one, individual, as Cusa points out in the next chapter of Book III, “this maximum is necessarily one, just as absolute maximumness is absolute unity.”²⁶⁴

If this Contracted Maximum must be one, then it must take the form of one of the individual created things, and this must be that creature which has most in common with the “whole company of beings”. In Book III, ch. 3, Cusa continues,

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Ibid., 173–174.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 175.

If, therefore, absolute maximumness is the being of all things in the most universal way and as a result is not more of one thing than of another, obviously that being that is more common to the whole company of beings is more capable of union with the maximum. If the nature of lower things is considered and if one of these lower beings were elevated to maximumness, such a being would be both God and itself.... But a line includes neither life nor intellect. How, therefore, could the line be taken to the maximum gradation, if it would not attain to the fullness of all natures? For it would be a maximum that could be greater and would lack perfections.²⁶⁵

But this union of the Highest Nature, that is, God, with the lower natures cannot be such that their union is greater than their separation; for this would entail that the union is higher than God, which is impossible. Further, it is the nature of this Maximum that includes all things, to embrace one form in such a way that nothing is excluded. Thus, the one form, which is united in the Contracted Maximum, which is both God and creature, must be a middle nature, that is, a created nature which embraces all aspects of created nature within itself. As Cusa explains further in the same passage:

A similar sort of thing must be said of the highest nature [God], which does not embrace the lower in such a way that the union of lower and higher natures is greater than their separation. Moreover, it befits the maximum, with which the minimum coincides, to embrace one thing in such a way that it does not forgo another but rather includes all things together. Accordingly, the middle nature, which is the means by which the lower and the higher are united, is alone that nature that can suitably be elevated to the maximum by the power of the maximum and infinite God. This middle nature enfolds all natures within itself, as the highest of the lower nature and the lowest of the higher. Consequently, if, in accord with all comprising it, it ascends to union with maximumness, it is evident that in this nature all natures and the whole universe have in every possible way attained to the highest gradation.²⁶⁶

This middle nature is human nature. Cusa goes on:

Indeed, it is human nature that is raised above all the works of God and made a little lower than the angels. It enfolds both intellectual and sensible nature and embraces all things within itself, so that the ancients, with rea-

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 175–176.

son, called it a microcosm or miniature world. Hence, it is this nature that, if elevated to a union with maximumness, would be the fullness of all the perfections of both the universe and of individual things, so that in humanity all things would reach the highest gradation. Humanity, however, exists in this or that thing only in a contracted way. For this reason, it would not be possible for more than one true human being to be able to ascend to union with maximumness, and, certainly, this being would be a human in such a way as to be God and God in such a way as to be a human. This human being would be the perfection of the universe, holding primacy in everything. And in this individual the least, the greatest, and the middle things of the nature united to absolute maximumness would so coincide that this human would be the perfection of all things, and all things, as contracted, would come to rest in this individual as in their own perfection.²⁶⁷

In Book III, ch. 4, Cusa concludes,

Since therefore God is in all things in such a way that all are in God, it is clear that: without any change to God and in the equality of being all things, God exists in unity with the maximum humanity of Jesus, for the maximum human can exist only maximally in God. And thus the eternal Father and the eternal Holy Spirit exist in Jesus, who is the equality of being all things, as they exist in the Son in the Divine, who is the middle person. And all things exist in Jesus as in the Word, and every creature exists in this highest and most perfect humanity, which universally enfolds all creatable things, so that all fullness dwells in him.²⁶⁸

What this reveals is that the Contracted Maximum must be human, and must be Human in such a way as to contain the perfection of the universe and all things in the universe. Thus the Contracted Maximum Human must, in some sense, be the universe, since as was seen above, the universe

²⁶⁷Ibid., 176. Cusa's logic as to why this must be "one true human" and not a plurality of humans seems incomplete. What seems to follow from the idea that "Humanity, however, exists in this or that thing only in a contracted way", is that if more than one human attained this union, then he would no longer be contracted, since it would not be a distinct or single human, and since it would be a plurality of human beings, as a plurality and not a contracted individual, it could not be human, since to be human is to be contracted into an individual. In addition, this Contracted Maximum Human in its plurality would require some higher single Human Being to be the perfection, to be the species, essence, or form, of Human Being in which these plural humans participate.

²⁶⁸Ibid., 179.

also was designated as a contracted maximum and contained the perfection of all things within it.

How is this to be understood? Is Cusa saying that the universe is Christ and Christ is the universe? In some sense, yes. Cusa is clear that Christ contains the perfection of all things. But Cusa is not a pantheist. It is not the case that the world is God in the same way God is the perfection of the world. Cusa is explicit. In Book II, ch. 4, Cusa says, “the contracted quiddity of the sun is other than the contracted quiddity of the moon, for whereas the absolute quiddity of a thing is not the thing, the contracted quiddity is not other than the thing.... God is not in the sun ‘sun’ and in the moon ‘moon’; rather God is that which is sun and moon without plurality and difference.”²⁶⁹ And further, as the quote from Book I, ch. 4, above makes clear, God is all things in such a way that He is none of them. Moran explains, “Everything has a restricted nature or contracted quiddity (*quidditas contracta*) which is its own and makes it what it is in this contracted universe.... On the other hand God is the absolute essence or quiddity of all things.”²⁷⁰ God is the perfection of all things, but insofar as they are contracted, they are not God, that is, they are not perfect, not their essence, because God is not contractible. As Cusa notes in *De Visione Dei* ch. 13, “the Infinite is not contractible but remains absolute. If the Infinite were contractible away from Infinity, it would not be the Infinite.”²⁷¹ And Hopkins concludes, “Eternity [God] itself is absolute, uncontracted, and uncontractible.”²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 139.

²⁷⁰ Moran, Dermot, “Pantheism from John Scottus Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 64, no. 131–152 (1990): 149.

²⁷¹ Nicholas of Cusa, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, II, 706.

²⁷² Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa’s Metaphysic of Contraction*, 102. As Moran notes, “Writers in the Christian Neoplatonic tradition from Dionysius the Areopagite to Nicholas of Cusa have been accused of conflating the being of the creature with the divine being, a heresy which later received the name ‘pantheism’” (Moran, “Pantheism from John Scottus Eriugena to Nicholas of Cusa,” 131). Given that Neoplatonists are so often accused of this error, a general and brief examination of this question is merited. To say that all things are reflections or manifestations of God is not the same as conflating all things with God. To claim that this is a conflation of beings with God would assume a substance ontology perspective. If we think of being in substantial terms, then it would be the case that for creatures to have their being in God would entail that their being is God’s Being, because Being is understood in terms of independent self-existence. Thus, God and things would become one entity. However, to say that things are manifestations of God in a relational or Neoplatonic ontology is simply to recognize that all things only are, only have their being, in relation to God.

But is this not precisely what happens with Christ, namely that God does, in fact, become contracted? Is this not what Cusa meant when he asserts that humanity must be contracted, and so Christ, as Contracted

Apart from God they are literally nothing. This is not to say that they simply are God; it is not to conflate creatures with God. In their very being they are manifestations of God insofar as their being is grounded in their relation with God, Who is Himself simply pure Relation, and as such, He is pure Self-Relation. But He is not a self-relation in the sense that there are two determinate selves relating to each other. Rather He is Self-Relation in the sense that as Pure Relation, God is the relation of relation to relation (note the three aspects again: Father, Son, Holy Spirit). Being is, as already noted, relationality, but it is relationality itself; not relationality grounded upon related things, that is, upon *relata*. And because God is Relation, and since the being of entities, as determinate, is relation (i.e., their relation to God), entities manifest God in their being, because they only have their being in God. But they have this being as determinate, that is, finite, beings, and so they are not God, Who is indeterminate, that is, infinite. Therefore, this understanding does not confuse entities with God; rather it grounds their being in God. Created things are, as all Neoplatonists avow, distinct from God, they are determinate. And this distinction, determination, entails their definite plurality in contrast to God's indefinite Unity. God is the indeterminate foundation of determinate entities, which by their very determinateness must be founded upon indeterminateness. This is because determinateness entails relationality as its ontological ground, and so this relationality must be independent of and ontologically prior to determination. And as independent of determination, Relation is by definition indeterminate. But in their determinateness, created beings are distinct from the indeterminate. Meister Eckhart perhaps describes it best when he states, "But indistinction belongs to God's nature; distinction to the created thing's nature and idea" (Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn, *The Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986), 169). Thus, it is the essence of God to be indistinct, indeterminate, while it is the essence of creatures to be distinct, determinate. (Although it must be noted that for Eckhart, precisely because God is indistinct, He becomes distinct, and in His distinction, God and creation are united: "Everything which is distinguished by indistinction is the more distinct the more indistinct it is, because it is distinguished by its own indistinction. Conversely, it is the more indistinct the more distinct it is, because it is distinguished by its own distinction from what is indistinct. Therefore, it will be the more indistinct insofar as it is distinct and vice versa" (ibid.). God's distinction/determinateness is precisely His indeterminateness. He is distinct because He is indeterminate; He is different/distinct from, creatures by virtue of His indistinction, and thus, because His indeterminateness makes Him distinct, His indistinction becomes distinction (and He also thereby becomes distinct from indistinction because distinction is the opposite of indistinction). When God becomes distinct, then created beings become indistinct from God because their very nature is distinction, and thus they, God and creation, are united. But neither does this conflate God and creation; rather it makes creation a mirror image, a "negative" image, of God. God is essentially indistinct, but this indistinction generates distinction. Creation, on the other hand, is essentially distinct, and this distinction generates indistinction. They are not the same but the reverse of each other. But this reverse image, this mirroring, connects God and creation.)

Maximum, must be a single human being? But Christ is perfectly human, and He is the only perfect human. And He is perfect *human*, because humanity contains all things within itself as the middle nature between creatures and God. Christ is the perfection of all things, but He is not all things in their contracted state. To say Christ is the perfection of all things, contains all things, is the same as saying He is the Essence of all things. Things are not Christ, are not God, precisely because they are contracted. But Christ is contracted, in fact He is the absolutely maximum contraction. But this is precisely the distinction between Christ as Perfect/Absolute Contraction and created things as contracted. Created beings are not contracted in an absolutely maximally contracted way. They are not their perfection. Their perfection is One, since perfection can lack nothing and so can only be one, but created things are many and so none, as an individual, is its perfection. If it were, there would only be one individual of each species. Christ contains all things in Himself as their perfection, as their unity (as was seen above in Book III, ch. 3, the Contracted Maximum must be *one*, and this one must be human, because humanity, as a middle nature, contains all things within itself), but the universe contains all things in their plurality, that is, created things are “parts” of the universe (as was seen above in Book II, ch. 4, where Cusa noted that the universe consists of parts and without these parts there is no universe). This entails that created beings are, in some sense, diminished versions of their perfection. But this is really all it means to say that they are “contracted”. To say created things are contracted to a “this” or “that” is to say they are diminutions, a “lowering” of the absolute. Cusa states this in Book II, ch. 4. He says, “All this becomes clear when contraction is considered in the right way. For contracted infinity, or simplicity, or indistinction, *in virtue of its contraction*, falls infinitely lower than that which is absolute”²⁷³ (emphasis added). To be contracted is to be lower than Perfection; it is to be diminished. Christ, as Absolute Maximum Contraction, is perfect contraction. He is the essence and perfection of contraction, just as He is the essence and perfection of all things. This Absolute Maximum Contraction is, as Cusa states in Book III, ch. 3, “the most perfect work of the maximum, infinite, and unlimitable power of God; in it there can be no deficiency”.²⁷⁴ So the Absolute Maximum Contraction is a contraction but a

²⁷³ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 138.

²⁷⁴ Nicholas of Cusa, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Nicholas of Cusa*, I, 120.

contraction that is not a lowering, a descent, from the Absolute. Christ is contracted in an uncontracted way, as must be so since God is uncontractible. And whereas Christ is uncontracted contraction, the universe, as was seen above, is the “contracted first”, the first contraction. So as contracted, all things are not God, but Christ, as Creator and creature, is the perfection of all things, and thus the perfection of contraction. Where the universe is a contracted maximum contraction, Christ is the Absolute Maximum Contraction. Thus as Absolute Contracted Maximum, Christ contains the perfection of the universe as contracted maximum contraction. Christ not only holds the perfection of all things within Himself, but He holds the perfection of the universe itself *qua* universe within Himself. It is not the case, however, that Christ and the universe are one in an undifferentiated manner, rather Christ stands between God and the universe. In Book III, ch. 3, Cusa states,

First, therefore, there is God as creator. Second there is God as both God and human, whose created humanity has been assumed into unity with God, as if the universal contraction of all things were hypostatically and personally united with the equality of being all things. And therefore, in the third place, through the most absolute God and by the mediating of the universal contraction, which is humanity, all things come forth into contracted being so that they could thus be what they are in the best possible order and manner.²⁷⁵

This passage makes a couple of important points. First, Christ stands between, He mediates between, God and creation. In commenting on the above passage, Albertson notes, “He [Cusa] does not simply state that the Incarnation represents the union of absolute and contracted maxima. What Nicholas actually writes is that what mediates (*medians*) between God and world is the unity of *aequalitas essendi* [equality of being] and *contractio universalis* [universal contraction].... The Incarnation becomes the medium that connects the absolute and the contracted.”²⁷⁶ But Christ

²⁷⁵ Nicholas of Cusa, *Nicholas of Cusa: Selected Spiritual Writings*, 177.

²⁷⁶ Albertson, David, *Mathematical Theologies: Nicholas of Cusa and the Legacy of Thierry of Chartres* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 198.

does not simply stand between God and creation, His mediation gives created things their being. They “come forth into contracted being so that they could thus be what they are in the best possible order and manner”. But in finding their being, they find themselves in God, and this only through Christ’s mediation as the Absolute Contracted Maximum. Roth explains, “Precisely because He [Christ] is contraction itself united with God, can any single being receive its origin in Him and in Him also return to God.”²⁷⁷ The second point worth noting is that once again, the monarchy of the Father is manifest. God as Creator is first, and the Son is second. But Cusa has already made clear that this cannot be second in a subordinationist sense. Christ is *Equality*, and first and foremost, this Equality is equality with God.

To sum up, just as we saw the universe is triune because it images God, so now we see the union of the universe with God in an even more profound ontological relationality: the universe gets its being in union with Christ. It finds its highest being there. It finds its perfection. Ultimately, the universe only truly is the universe in Christ, in union with God. The ontological relationality that grounds both God and creation is deeply profound in Nicholas of Cusa.

Nicholas of Cusa draws the discussion of Christian Neoplatonism to a close. It would be presumptuous to say that he is the last Neoplatonist, neither is it the case that the relational understanding of Being ends with him. Sparks of a Neoplatonic understanding of Being continue to glister, albeit perhaps faintly, in the blinding background of an increasingly dominant substance understanding of ontology. As Wallis recognizes, a Neoplatonic influence can be seen in the Cambridge Platonists in Britain as well as, to a greater degree, in the Continental philosophies of such

²⁷⁷ Roth, Ulli, *Suchende Vernunft: Der Glaubensbegriff des Nicolaus Cusanus* (Münster: Ascendorff Verlag, 2000), 78. My translation.

thinkers as Spinoza, Leibniz, Schelling, and Hegel.²⁷⁸ Nevertheless, Cusa stands at the threshold of the Medieval and Modern ages, and so marks a fitting conclusion to this section.²⁷⁹ From this point on in the history of philosophy, one must deal with, what Wallis calls, the “unfortunate results” of the “divorce” between mind and matter posited by Descartes.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁸Wallis, R. T., *Neoplatonism* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995), 173. Hegel, for example, sees relationality as the ground of both consciousness and Being. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, regarding consciousness, he writes, “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged. The Notion of this its unity in its duplication embraces many and varied meanings. Its moments, then, must on the one hand be held strictly apart, and on the other hand must in this differentiation at the same time also be taken and known as not distinct, or in their opposite significance. The twofold significance of the distinct moments has in the nature of self-consciousness to be infinite, or directly the opposite of the determinateness in which it is posited” (Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 111). And in *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel identifies the “I” as “infinite self-relation” (Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Philosophy of Mind: Part 3 of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 244). And regarding determinate being, he states in *Science of Logic*, “In considering determinate being the emphasis falls on its determinate character; the determinateness is in the form of being, and as such it is quality. Through its quality, something is determined as opposed to another, as alterable and finite; and as negatively determined not only against another but also in its own self” (Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst: Humanity Books, 1969), 109). And regarding Being Itself, he states that Being is united with non-Being, and this, as Becoming, is what gives rise to determinate being. In fact, determinate being is “the simple oneness of being and nothing” (ibid.) Thus both Being and consciousness for Hegel are fundamentally ontologically relational.

²⁷⁹See Blumenberg, Hans, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 469. Moore also notes that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, “it was often debated whether Cusanus should be seen as the first modern thinker, or conversely, as the last great medieval mind” (Moore, Michael Edward, *Nicholas of Cusa and the Kairos of Modernity: Cassirer, Gadamer, Blumenberg* (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2013), 1).

²⁸⁰Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 173.



CHAPTER 4

The Aristotelians: The Path of Substance

ARISTOTLE

Before examining the philosopher called “the greatest metaphysician” by Whitehead,¹ and in whom, according to Heidegger, “the philosophy of antiquity reached its acme”,² it was necessary to consider his predecessor, Plato, and the alternate and neglected metaphysical path of ontological relationality. With the relational path of the Neoplatonists considered, it is now time to move on to the path of substance.

The most significant difference between Aristotle and the Neoplatonists is that God, who is relational in Neoplatonism, is understood in terms of

¹ “[I]f we are to accord to anyone the position of the greatest metaphysician, having regard to genius of insight, to general equipment in knowledge, and to the stimulus of his metaphysical ancestry; we must choose Aristotle.” Whitehead, Alfred North, *Science and the Modern World* (New York: The New American Library, 1948), 173.

² (Heidegger, Martin, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 35.) According to Heidegger, the decline of philosophy also begins with him, since after Aristotle, philosophy loses its “rootedness”: “Everything that had once grown out of the most diverse questions—extrinsically unconnected, but all the more intrinsically rooted—now becomes rootless, heaped together in subjects according to viewpoints that can be taught and learned. The context and its rootedness are replaced by an ordering within subjects and scholastic disciplines. The question is which viewpoints now regulate the ordering of this rich material, which is no longer taken hold of at its core or in its vitality” (ibid.).

substance for Aristotle. As noted earlier,³ in *Categories* 5 (2a11–13) Aristotle states, “That which is substance most strictly, primarily, and most of all—is that which is neither said of a subject nor in a subject.”⁴ And in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, he again defines substance as “that which is not predicated of a subject, but of which all else is predicated” (1029a8–9),⁵ and later as “both separability and individuality” (1029a28).⁶ Even his understanding of relation is intimately linked to his understanding of substance. Relation, instead of being ontological foundational to Being, is founded *upon* Being as substance. Relation is understood as something that exists between two independent entities, two substantial beings: “We call *relatives* all such things as are said to be just what they are, *of* or *than* other things, or in some other way *in relation to* something else” (6a37–38)⁷ (emphasis in the translation). Therefore, from the outset it can be seen that relation cannot have the metaphysically constitutive characteristic that it does for the Neoplatonists. That is preemptively precluded. It nevertheless remains to be examined precisely how his understanding of substance shapes his understanding of entities and God.

That there is a relationality in Aristotle’s metaphysics is clear. In *Physics* I.7 (190b11–13, 17–20) Aristotle states,

Whatever comes to be is always complex. There is, on the one hand, something which comes to be, and again something which becomes that—the latter in two senses, either the subject or the opposite ... Plainly then, if there are causes and principles which constitute natural objects and from which they primarily are or have come to be—have come to be, I mean, what each is said to be in its substance, not what each is accidentally—plainly, I say, everything comes to be from both subject and form.⁸

Aristotle explains what he means by “subject” earlier in (190a34): “It is plain that there must be something underlying, namely, that which becomes.”⁹ Thus, everything sensible is a combination of both subject and form. But what is this “subject” which underlies? In *Physics* I.9

³ See Chap. 1, subsection “The Problem”.

⁴ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2: 1625.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Categories* 7 (*ibid.*, 1: 10.)

⁸ *Ibid.*, 325.

⁹ *Ibid.*

(192a31–32), Aristotle makes clear that it is “matter”: “my definition of matter is just this—the primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be, and which persists in the result, not accidentally.”¹⁰ Thus, things are relational in that they exist as a relation of form and matter. As Owens notes, “[The] ultimate constituents of sensible things, according to the Aristotelian reasoning, were form and matter. Matter played the role of ultimate subject, and a form was its primary characteristic.”¹¹ But this relationality of form and matter is a “πρός τι” relationality in which relation is determined by two independent substantial entities (in this case form and matter), as will be seen as we discuss the substantiality of form and matter in more detail.

In *On the Soul* II.1 (412a8–10), Aristotle, in defining the different senses of substance, explicitly identifies form with substance, stating that one sense of substance is “form or essence, which is that precisely in virtue of which a thing is called a this ... [F]orm is actuality.”¹² And as Aristotle says in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).4 (1029b13), “The essence [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι] of each thing is what it is said to be in virtue of itself [καθ’ αὐτό].”¹³ Form, then, is the “actuality” of something, it’s “essence”, that which makes it what it is, a “this”. And as that which each thing is “in itself” (καθ’ αὐτό), it is quintessentially substance. In fact, in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 (1029a26–32) Aristotle implicitly identifies form as primary substance:

For those who adopt this point of view [i.e., that matter, being nothing in particular, must be that which other things are predicated of most], then, it follows that matter is substance. But this is impossible; for both separability and individuality are thought to belong chiefly to substance. And so both form and the compound of form and matter would be thought to be

¹⁰ Ibid., 328.

¹¹ Owens, Joseph, “Matter and Predication in Aristotle,” in *Aristotle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. J. M. E. Moravcsik (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1967), 196.

¹² Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 656.

¹³ Ibid., 2: 1625–1626. The identification of essence and form is recognized by numerous scholars, for example, Owens, Joseph, *Aristotle’s Gradations of Being in Metaphysics E-Z* (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 137–18; Yu, Jiyuan, *The Structure of Being in Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 105; it is assumed by Witt, Charlotte, *Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of Metaphysics VII-IX* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 112; Gill lays out the numerous passages in which Aristotle identifies essence and form in Gill, Mary Louise, *Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 119 n. 18.

substance, rather than matter. The substance compounded of both, i.e., of matter and shape, may be dismissed; for it is posterior and its nature is obvious.¹⁴

Since matter cannot be the ultimate substance, and the combination of form and matter is posterior to both form and matter, the only candidate remaining is form. As Halper recognizes, “Much of Z 3 aims to show that form is ‘more *ousia* than matter’.”¹⁵ And if it is “more *ousia* than matter”, it is also more “*ousia*” than the combination of both, as Aristotle just argued. So it should be clear that form is not only substance but primary substance, but if it is substance, then it is separable and individual, and as individual its being is “according to itself” (καθ' αὐτό).¹⁶ So one part of the relation of form and matter, that is, form, is governed by Aristotle’s notion of substance as independent existence. Is the same true in the case of matter?

Matter has a somewhat strange ontological status for Aristotle. It seems both to be and not be substance. In *On the Soul* II.1 (412a7, 9), the same passage in which he discusses the different senses of substance, Aristotle now identifies matter with substance, defining matter as “that which in itself is not a this (ὃ καθ' αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστι τόδε τι)”, as “potentiality (δύναμις)”.¹⁷ And in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 (1029a20–21, 24–26), he says matter is “that which in itself is neither a particular thing nor of a certain quantity nor assigned to any other of the categories by which being is determined ... Therefore the ultimate substratum (τὸ ἔχχατον) [matter] is of itself neither a particular thing nor of a particular quantity nor otherwise positively characterized; nor yet negatively, for negations also will

¹⁴ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1625.

¹⁵ Halper, Edward, *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books* (Las Vegas: Parmenides Publishing, 2005), 39.

¹⁶ Halper also notes that separability entails unity: “What Aristotle refers to as separate in one text he will, with apparently the same character in mind, elsewhere term one. Something that exists by itself (e.g., form without matter) is separate because it is one ... Thus, Aristotle often seems to think of separation as a result of unity or even as a kind of unity” (ibid., 38). This may be true, but it must be noted that this unity or oneness is a definite numerical unity. It is not a One which precedes both unity and multiplicity, and this is a result of Aristotle’s understanding of substance/οὐσία as being separate and independent.

¹⁷ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 656.

belong to it only by accident.”¹⁸ And in *Physics* I.9, as has already been seen above, Aristotle defines matter chiefly as “the primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be, and which persists in the result, not accidentally”. So the nature of matter is that it is a substrate which underlies things and is potentiality. But potentially what? Aristotle explains in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).4 (1070b11–13), “the elements of perceptible bodies are, as *form*, the hot, and in another sense the cold, which is the *privation*; and, as *matter*, that which directly and of itself is potentially these”¹⁹ (emphasis in the translation). In *Physics* I.9 (192a16–25) Aristotle describes this potentiality in a most interesting way:

For admitting that there is something divine, good, and desirable [form], we hold that there are two other principles, the one contrary to it [the privation in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).4], the other such as of its own nature to desire and yearn for it [matter]. But the consequence of their view is that the contrary desires its own extinction. Yet the form cannot desire itself, for it is not defective; nor can the contrary desire it, for contraries are mutually destruc-

¹⁸ Ibid., 2: 1625. Sachs and Reeve both translate “τὸ ἔσχατον” literally as “last thing”. (See Sachs, Joe, *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (Santa Fe: Green Lion Press, 1999), 119. and Reeve, C. D. C., *Aristotle Metaphysics* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2016), 106.) The significance here is that Barnes seems to recognize “τὸ ἔσχατον” as referring to “primary matter”, which, since it is pure potentiality, would have no characteristics, although this might not be the case since “ultimate” can be ambiguous. Nevertheless, whether “τὸ ἔσχατον” refers to Prime Matter or not, it seems clear that it does refer to an “ultimate substrate”. Loux asserts that Aristotle usually calls “proximate matter” “last matter”. (Loux, Michael J., *Primary Ousia: An Essay on Aristotle’s Metaphysics Z and H* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 64 n. 30.). This cannot apply here, because the description of “τὸ ἔσχατον” does not fit the characteristics of “proximate matter”. Bronze, wood, etc., still have characteristics which Aristotle denies of “τὸ ἔσχατον”, as Halper recognizes: “bronze, wood, and the other matters do fall under categories, contrary to what Aristotle claims of ‘matter’ at 1029a20–23.” (Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle’s Metaphysics: The Central Books*, 265 n. 27.)

¹⁹ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1691. The notion of hot as a form and cold as a privation is in the order of becoming is explained in *Physics* I.7 (191a13–17), where Aristotle, explaining the principles of becoming, summarizes, “One [principle] is the form or definition [hot in the example above]; then further there is its contrary, the privation [cold]. In what sense these are two, and in what sense more, has been stated above. We explained first that only the contraries were principles, and later that something else underlay them [matter], and that the principles were three” (accepting Barnes’ emendation following Bonitz—ibid., 1: 326 n. 6).

tive. *The truth is that what desires the form is matter, as the female desires the male and the ugly the beautiful—only the ugly or the female not in itself but accidentally.*²⁰ (emphasis added)

From this one can see that potentiality is the potentiality for some form, and since form is a “this”, it is the potentiality to be a “this”, to be some thing. As the passage in *Physics* I.9 indicates, potentiality desires and longs for form; it strives for “thisness”.

Aristotle’s understanding of matter is, however, more complex and therefore requires some explanation before going on. Aristotle describes two types of matter. The first type, and the type this discussion will primarily focus on, is “prime” or “ultimate” matter, which underlies all things.²¹

²⁰ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 328.

²¹ A number of scholars, as Gill notes, see the description in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 as a reference to “prime matter”, which, as she recognizes, is “the ultimate substratum that is nothing in its own right”. (Gill, *Aristotle on Substance: The Paradox of Unity*, 20–21.) In the same place, she also provides a discussion of the two main readings of the passage in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3. She says there are two primary reasons scholars cite for rejecting this as a reference to Prime Matter: (1) when Aristotle introduces matter as a candidate to be the substrate, he offers bronze as an example, therefore the reader should expect the argument to refer to bronze or other similar stuffs, and (2) since Aristotle initially begins stripping away from an object such as a statue, then one would expect what’s left over after the stripping away is complete to be the matter of the original statue, that is, bronze. I find the reasons Gill notes for denying this as a reference to Prime Matter unconvincing for three reasons: (1) the matter left over has no characteristics, while bronze would still have at least some of the very characteristics Aristotle has stripped away (it is at the very least a “τὶ”, “a certain thing”). As already noted, Halper recognizes this as well when he states, “Bronze, wood, and the other matters do fall under categories, contrary to what Aristotle claims of ‘matter’ at 1029a20–23.” (Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle’s Metaphysics: The Central Books*, 265 n. 27.) (2) There is no reason the stripping away should stop with some physical stuff, such as bronze or wood, and to do so, as just noted, does not end in something such as Aristotle describes, that is, with something that lacks characteristics. And (3) the definition of matter Aristotle gives in *Physics* I.9 fits the description given here and does not apply to “proximate matter”, such as bronze. As Aristotle explains in *Physics* I.9 matter must be “outside the sphere of becoming” (192a28), but things like bronze and wood and other stuffs are not outside the sphere of becoming. In sum, the pure substrate, described in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, fits the description we find elsewhere of matter “in itself” and does not fit things such as bronze. Robinson also discusses *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 in relation to the notion of Prime Matter. He states, “This passage does not present an argument for prime matter, though it may show that Aristotle believed in prime matter.” And he adds, “Whether it does show this depends on two things. These are whether: (1) one takes the stripping of predicates, leaving a bare substratum, to be a process which Aristotle believes is legitimate, or one which he believes is illegitimate. (2) whether one thinks that the bare potentiality uncovered by the stripping of predicates is the

The second type is “proximate” matter which is some material, for example, bronze or wood, which underlies objects such as statues and beds.²² What makes both “matter” is that that they are both subjects/substrates and they are both potential. The potentiality of “secondary” or “proximate” matter is demonstrated in *Metaphysics* Book IX(Θ).7 (1049a18–24):

It seems that when we call a thing not something else but ‘of’ that something (e.g., a casket is not wood but of wood, and wood is not earth but made of earth, and again perhaps in the same way earth is not something else but made of that something), that something is always potentially (in the full sense of that word) the thing which comes after it in this series. E.g., a casket is not earthen nor earth, but wooden; for wood is potentially a casket and is the matter of a casket, wood in general of a casket in general, and this particular wood of this particular casket.²³

And just as “primary matter” is the ultimate substrate, so “secondary matter”, wood in this case, is also the underlying substrate for the form “box”, as Aristotle notes a little later in (1049a29–30, 34–36): “For the subject and substratum differ by being or not being a ‘this’; the substratum of *accidents* is an individual such as a man, i.e., body and soul, while the accident is something like musical or white ... Wherever this is so, then, the ultimate subject is a substance; but when this is not so but the predicate is a form or a ‘this’, the ultimate subject is matter and material substance [in contrast to wood]”²⁴ (emphasis in the translation). Since both

same thing as prime matter.” (Robinson, H. M., “Prime Matter in Aristotle,” *Phronesis* 19, no. 2 (1974): 183–184.) It seems to me that the question of whether the “stripping away of predicates” is a legitimate enterprise is not significant for our discussion. What matters is that Aristotle does assert an understanding of “matter” as a bare substratum which is nothing in itself and with which Form combines. To deny that there is such a substrate would unjustifiably reject what Aristotle says here as well as other passages. This bare substrate, which is nothing in itself and therefore persists through change, is the foundation for Form in natural objects, and it makes change possible. Whether it is called “prime” matter, “indeterminate” matter, or something else is irrelevant. I will use the terms “prime matter”, “indeterminate matter”, and “matter” interchangeably. I will use explicit terms such as “secondary matter” or “proximate matter” to refer to “matter” such as bronze or wood.

²² It also underlies living organisms, for which the proximate matter would be flesh and bones. For the purposes of this project, the distinction between living organisms and artifacts will be ignored. We will use both as examples, for example, “man” made of “flesh and bones” and “statue” made of “bronze”, interchangeably throughout the discussion.

²³ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1657.

²⁴ Ibid.

“proximate” matter and “prime” matter function as both substrate and potentiality, but only “prime” matter does so purely and solely (“primary matter” alone is not a composite together with form and so functions solely as substrate and potentiality, while bronze and wood are composites of form and matter and so function as both form and matter), “proximate” or “secondary” matter, in its function as substrate and potentiality, functionally reduces to “prime” matter. As such, in discussing matter, the focus will be on “pure” matter or “prime” matter. What Halper calls “indeterminate” matter.²⁵ This is matter understood as matter “in itself”.

What makes matter ontologically strange is precisely its lack of any characteristics. As Loux rightly notes, the passage in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 (1029a20–26) “is not without its difficulties”.²⁶ According to Owens, its lack of characteristics removes it from the realm of being/substance altogether:

But this ultimate matter has no determining characteristics whatever, either substantial or accidental. It totally lacks the hallmark of *ousia*, that is, of

²⁵ Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*, 265 n. 27.

²⁶ Loux, Michael J., “Form, Species and Predication in *Metaphysics* Z, H, and Θ,” *Mind* 88, no. 349 (1979): 10. For Loux, however, the difficulty lies in interpreting the passage to indicate that “substance/form” is predicated of “indeterminate matter”, since Aristotle seems to say in other passages that form is always predicated of “proximate” matter. He then argues that Aristotle must be thinking of forms of “elementary substance-forms (e.g., fire, earth, air, and water)” which are predicated of “indeterminate” matter. He then claims that Aristotle’s point is that these “elementary substance-forms” can only be predicated of indeterminate matter “accidentally” (κατὰ συμβεβηκός), and that Aristotle is asserting a general principle that substance/form can only be predicated of matter “accidentally” (ibid., 10–11). If this is correct, this seems to involve a somewhat hierarchical process. Elemental forms subsist in indeterminate matter, while “higher” forms subsist in proximate matter. Thus, the form “man” subsists in the proximate matter “flesh and bones”; the form “statue” subsists in the proximate matter “bronze”. And even these examples of proximate matter must subsist in their own proximate matter, which is the proximate matter of the elements; for example, “wood” would subsist in the proximate matter of whichever elements make up wood. Whether this is Aristotle’s view or not is beyond our scope. Nevertheless, that forms can only be predicated of matter, especially prime matter, “accidentally” seems obvious. To say that forms are predicated of matter “essentially” would be to claim that prime matter (potentiality) has an essential form (actuality), which would contradict its very nature. Further, in the passages cited by Loux in which Aristotle “explicitly” states “that a substance-form is *always* predicated of a ‘proximate’ matter” (emphasis added), for example, *Metaphysics* VIII(H).4 (1044a17–18) and IX(Θ).7 *passim*, Aristotle is certainly discussing the predication of forms to proximate materials, but I see nowhere where Aristotle asserts, explicitly or otherwise, that this is *always* the case.

something separate in the sense of a “this” (*Metaphysics* VII(Z).3.1029a7–28). What does that mean? With “being” understood in the meaning of so and so, the ultimate matter, which is not so in any way at all when considered just in itself, obviously cannot function as the primary instance of being. Alone by itself it has no knowable characteristics ... [T]he absolutely undetermined matter lacks the role of endowing the sensible thing with being. It cannot impart to anything else what it in no way has in itself. It cannot have the role of beingness in regard to anything whatever. The ultimate explanation of *ousia* cannot be given in terms of matter. *Ousia*, as has been seen, carries with it the characteristic of having a meaning separately just in itself, the meaning of something definite. Any attempt to explain it ultimately in terms of substrate cannot hope to be successful.²⁷

Thus, in Owens’ view, matter cannot be substance. Aristotle seems to say the same thing in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 (1029a26–27), “For those who adopt this point of view, then, it follows that matter is substance. But this is impossible; for both separability and individuality are thought to belong chiefly to substance.”²⁸ But it is clear that matter is the substrate mentioned in this passage, and Aristotle himself also seems to identify substrate with substance when in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 he states at (1028b36–37), “the *substratum* is that of which other things are predicated, while it is itself not predicated of anything else” and a few lines later at (1029a7–8), “We have now outlined the nature of *substance*, showing that it is that which is not predicated of a subject, but of which all else is predicated”²⁹ (emphases added). Halper also seems to recognize the identification of substrate and substance stating, “the chapter [*Metaphysics* VII(Z).3] does not ask, which is the primary substrate? but, what probably amounts to the

²⁷ Owens, *Aristotle’s Gradations of Being in Metaphysics* E–Z, 94.

²⁸ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1625. Halper notes that the central question of *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 is which of the three (matter, form, and the composite of both) is the *primary* substrate/substance. (Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle’s Metaphysics: The Central Books*, 39.) This mitigates, to a certain degree at least, Aristotle’s assertion that this “indeterminate matter” cannot be substance. It could be argued that Aristotle’s primary claim here is that the indeterminate matter cannot be the *primary* substance and so could be substance, just not the primary one (which Aristotle claims is form (1029a27–33)). Although Halper disagrees that Aristotle’s argument demonstrates that matter cannot be substance, he does ultimately agree that this “indeterminate matter” cannot be substance, since it cannot be separable: “The argument shows only that completely undetermined matter cannot be *ousia*” (ibid., 40).

²⁹ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1624–1625.

same thing, which is the primary being?”³⁰ Since, therefore, matter is clearly a substrate, and substrate seems to, in some sense at least, equate to substance, a blanket assertion that matter simply is not substance cannot be correct. The assertion must be a qualified one. And for Aristotle it is.

It has already been seen that in *On the Soul* II.1 (412a7–10) Aristotle identifies matter with substance. It has also already been shown that in *Physics* I.9 Aristotle explicitly states and even defines matter as a “substratum”. And if, as was just seen, “substrate” and “substance” are identical, then matter must be a substance, at least in some sense. Yet, more explicitly, in *Physics* I.9 (192a5–6), he says, “Matter is nearly, in a sense *is*, substance”³¹ (emphasis in the translation). So what does this mean? Is Aristotle talking about the same matter in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 and *Physics* I.9?

³⁰ Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*, 39. We have already seen that form is the primary substance, and if substance and substrate are equated, how are we to understanding form as the primary substrate? We must remember that in the context of *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, substrate is that which is predicated of nothing and other things are predicated of it. In this context, form is the substrate which other things are predicated of, for example, “man” is the form of which “musical” is predicated in “a musical man”. But “man” is predicated of nothing else. Even to say, “Socrates is a man” is not to predicate “man” of Socrates; rather, it is to recognize that “man” is the form which underlies Socrates and makes him to be a “man” in actuality. Otherwise, whatever is there of Socrates is only potentially an actual man. Could we not say the same of musical? Without “musical” Socrates is only potentially musical? In a sense, but “man” is the essence of what Socrates is; musical is only an accident of Socrates. To strip Socrates of “man” changes his essence; to strip him of “musical” changes only an accidental property of his essence. Matter is not the first substrate because it is nothing particular; it does not make anything to be anything actually. Form makes a thing what it is, and so it is the substrate which underlies what a thing is. Matter underlies it as a substrate which persists through change; it underlies a thing as the potentiality for which a thing can be. Halper defines “substrate” as “the subject of predications; since predicates are things, so is their substrate. Aristotle distinguishes three kinds of substrate: matter, form, and composite. The last is primary *ousia* in the *Categories*. In the *Metaphysics*, the formal substrate, the form, is primary” (ibid., xxiv). Matter is a substrate in that form, as what something can be, are predicated of it, for example, a “seed” has the potentiality to be a “man”. But there is something else which has the potentiality to be a “seed”. Ultimately, prime matter as pure potentiality underlies everything as the ultimate potentiality to be a form. Thus, when Aristotle says “matter desires (ἐπιέσθαι καὶ ὀρέγεσθαι) form” (*Physics* I.9), this means that matter, as pure potentiality, seeks after actuality. And so matter seeks form to be attached to it. It strives to be actual. And in this way, it underlies form as the potentiality which seeks to fulfill its potentiality in actuality. It seeks something to be.

³¹ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 328.

There are a number of reasons to believe Aristotle is speaking of the same indeterminate matter in *Physics* I.9 as he is in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3. First, in *Physics* I.9 (192a31–32), as was shown above, Aristotle explicitly identifies matter with the “primary substrate”: “For my definition of matter is just this—the primary substratum of each thing, from which it comes to be, and which persists in the result, not accidentally.” Thus, it seems natural to identify matter as primary substrate in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 with matter as primary substrate in *Physics* I.9.³² Also, matter in both accounts shares the same characteristics. In *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, matter has no properties and no characteristics, and matter as described in *Physics* I.9 is likewise without actual characteristics. In (192a25–29) Aristotle defines its nature as “potentiality”: “The matter comes to be and ceases to be in one sense, while in another it does not. As that which contains the privation, it ceases to be in its own nature; for what ceases to be—the privation—is contained within it. But *as potentiality it does not cease to be in its own nature*, but is necessarily outside the sphere of becoming and ceasing to be”³³ (emphasis added). And, commenting on this passage, Philoponus states, “For it [matter] is always all things in potentiality; while it does not always have the *privation*, yet it always has its <capacity for> *being everything in potentiality*. And ‘this is its nature’”³⁴ (emphasis in the translation). Since potentiality is its essential nature, it cannot, in its nature, be anything actually; it can have no actual characteristics, only potential ones. So just as matter in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 was nothing actually, the same is true matter in *Physics* I.9. Moreover, a little earlier, in (192a13), Aristotle contrasts matter and form, distinguishing them: “For the one which persists [the substrate] is a joint cause, with the form, of what comes to be.”³⁵ Since matter is distinct from form, then it can have no form, that is, no actuality. And finally, in (192a3–8) Aristotle contrasts his understanding of matter as the underlying substrate (and privation contained within it) with Plato’s Indefinite Dyad: “Now we distinguish matter and privation, and hold that one of these, namely the matter, accidentally is

³² The question, “How can we identify matter as primary substrate in both *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3 and *Physics* I.9 when Aristotle seems to reject it as primary substrate/substance in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3?” will be dealt with below.

³³ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 328.

³⁴ Philoponus, John, *Philoponus: On Aristotle Physics 1.4-9*, ed. Richard Sorabji, trans. Catherine Osborne, Ancient Commentators on Aristotle (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2009), 133.

³⁵ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 328.

not, while the privation in its own nature is not; and that the matter is nearly, in a sense is, substance, while the privation in no sense is. They, on the other hand, identify their Great and Small alike with what is not, and that whether they are taken together as one or separately.”³⁶ The contrast with Plato’s Indefinite Dyad is interesting in that it shows that Aristotle intends, at least on some level, for matter to function as the Indefinite Dyad does for Plato. Since the Indefinite Dyad was, for Plato, ontologically prior to the Forms, Aristotle’s matter should at least be distinct from form.³⁷ And as distinct from form, again, it cannot be anything in actuality.³⁸ To summarize, that potentiality is matter’s own nature means it is, in its essence, nothing actually. This is also revealed by matter’s distinction from and contrast with form, and this distinction entails that matter, in *Physics* I.9, has no form. This means it has no determinate characteristics.

³⁶Ibid. Simplicius also recognizes that Aristotle is referring to Plato here and says that Aristotle is “[s]etting out the difference between his own view of matter and privation and Plato’s”. (Simplicius, *Simplicius: On Aristotle Physics 1.5-9*, ed. Richard Sorabji, trans. Han Baltussen, et al., Ancient Commentators on Aristotle (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 130.)

³⁷As we have seen in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, for Aristotle matter cannot be ontologically prior to form, since form is primary substance. I will explore this relationship more deeply below.

³⁸I am following the traditional view here, which, as Williams notes, is “This underlying matter, which persists through the change, is not itself perceptible, nor is it anything in actuality. It is not actually water or air, although it is both these things in potentiality, and indeed all things in potentiality. It is not body, but it is potentially so. It has no character in actuality. It falls under none of the categories, substance, quantity, quality, etc. The Scholastics called it ‘pure potentiality’ and placed it at the opposite end of the scale of being from God, who is pure actuality. It was generally known as ‘prime matter.’” (Williams, C. J. F., *Aristotle’s De Generatione et Corruptione* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 211.) Bostock rejects the traditional interpretation. He recognizes the plausibility of this interpretation, “A second conclusion that he [Aristotle] draws [about matter] is that this ultimate matter has no essence; that is to say, there is no property which it has ‘in its own right’, and so must continue to have throughout its existence ... One can see from these examples why Aristotle should think it plausible to argue that since the same matter is capable of taking on any form, there is no form that is essential to it. So it is, as he thinks of it, all things potentially, which is just another way of saying that there is nothing which it has to be. On some occasions his words do seem to suggest that, since matter is all things potentially, it is *nothing actually*”, but he then concludes, “but this make no sense, and is not his real view” (emphasis in the original). (Bostock, David, *Space, Time, Matter, and Form: Essays on Aristotle’s Physics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 34.) For other scholars who reject the traditional interpretation and responses to their views, see Williams, *Aristotle’s De Generatione et Corruptione*, 211.

It cannot be “proximate” matter, such as bronze or wood, since they do have forms, that is, the form “bronze” and “wood”.

What does this mean for the substantiality of matter? First, matter has a nature of its own (καθ' αὐτό). As we have seen, Aristotle says it has its own nature as “primary substrate”, but it also has its own nature as potentiality. But this presents a potential problem. Is it justified to assert that potentiality is matter’s “own nature” given that Aristotle explicitly said “primary substrate” is? Upon closer examination of the passage at *Physics* I.9 (192a25–29),³⁹ the answer is yes. Matter ceases to be in the sense that as that which has privation in it, it ceases to have this privation when the privation which is in it ceases to be, and so it ceases to be *accidentally*. But in its own nature *as potentiality* it does not cease to be. This is clear from Aristotle’s assertion in *Physics* I.9 (192a4–5), “Now we distinguish matter and privation, and hold that one of these, namely the matter, accidentally is not, while the privation in its own nature is not.” As potentiality, matter does not cease to be in essence, in its own nature. It only ceases to be accidentally, as that which accidentally contains privation. Simplicius describes it as follows: “Matter is non-being in an accidental sense, he [Aristotle] says, because privation accidentally belongs to it and privation is nonbeing *per se*.”⁴⁰ But how can matter be both “potentiality” and “primary substance” in its own nature? Claiming that matter is “primary substrate” seems dubious, especially given that Aristotle seemed to claim that form is primary substance/substrate in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3. The answer lies in understanding that it is primary substrate precisely by being potentiality. As substance, as that which is a “this”, form is primary. Matter is nothing actually and, as was seen, seeks and desires form. Thus form, as that which is a “this”, is primary substance, and further form is primary substrate as that of which things are predicated while nothing is predicated of it, that is, things are predicated of some *thing*. But matter is primary substrate in two ways. First, matter, as potentiality, that is, as that which can and, in fact does, take on form, it is that in which form inheres to make some *thing* what it is. Matter underlies form in this way and so is the primary substrate to form. As such, matter is that in which form subsists in

³⁹ “The matter comes to be and ceases to be in one sense, while in another it does not. As that which contains the privation, it ceases to be in its own nature; for what ceases to be—the privation—is contained within it. But as potentiality it does not cease to be in its own nature, but is necessarily outside the sphere of becoming and ceasing to be.”

⁴⁰ Simplicius, *Simplicius: On Aristotle Physics* 1.5–9, 130.

the realm of sensible/natural objects. In order for a thing to be a particular thing, it must consist of form and matter. Form makes a thing what it is, but it is matter which makes it concrete, particular. Aristotle notes in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).8 (1034a5–8), “And when we have the whole, such and such a form in this flesh and in these bones, this is Callias or Socrates; and they are different in virtue of their matter (for that is different), but the same in form; for their form is indivisible.”⁴¹ Thus, matter differentiates things into particular instances of a form, and so in this way it underlies form, it is the substrate for form in a particular thing. Second, and related to the first, matter underlies and is the substrate for change. As we saw in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).4 (1070b11–13) cited above, sensible objects consist of three elements: (1) form (hot), (2) privation (cold), and (3) matter (what is potentially hot and cold). In *Physics* I.9 (192a16–25), we get the same three elements: (1) the “divine” “desirable”, which is form, (2) the contrary, which is an opposing form, that is, the privation in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).4, and (3) matter. These three elements explain how change or becoming works for Aristotle. Matter, as that which is potentially any form, underlies and persists through the change from one form to the contrary form. Since it must underlie the change and persist through the change, it cannot be the form that changes or the contrary form that comes to be. Aristotle describes the process in *Physics* I.7 (190a9–13), “When a simple thing is said to become something, in one case it survives through the process, in the other it does not. For the man remains a man and is such even when he becomes musical, whereas what is not musical or is unmusical does not survive, either simply or combined with the subject.”⁴² Or, perhaps more obviously, with hot and cold, there is a thing which becomes hot from being cold, but the thing that becomes hot or cold persists and underlies the change and is potentially either hot or cold. In this way, matter has, as its essential nature, both primary substrate (for form and change) and potentiality (as that which is potentially any form).

But how does potentiality contain privation in it if, according to its own nature, it has no characteristics? It has already been seen that it contains it “accidentally” and not essentially, and in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, as noted above, Aristotle says, “Negations also will belong to it [matter] only by accident.” But how can matter contain privation at all? Aristotle does not say, but from what has been said a conclusion can be drawn. It seems clear

⁴¹ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1632.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 1: 324.

that as potentiality, matter “is not” anything actually. Since “privation” simply is an absence, that is, an “is not”, matter, as potentiality, must contain “is not” within it. Aristotle himself equates “what is not” and “privation”. In the opening lines of *Physics* I.9, Aristotle discusses previous thinkers and notes, “Others, indeed, have apprehended the nature in question, but not adequately. In the first place they allow that a thing may come to be without qualification from what is not, accepting on this point the statement of Parmenides. Secondly, they think that if it is one numerically, it must have also only a single potentiality—which is a very different thing” (191b35–192a3).⁴³ According to Aristotle, one of the mistakes his predecessors made is that they failed to distinguish potentiality and “what is not”, privation, properly. The very next line, as noted in (192a3) above, says, “Now we distinguish matter and privation” and adds “privation in its own nature is not”, showing that Aristotle is equating his “privation” with the “what is not” of his predecessors. Thus, while his predecessors confused “what is not” and “potentiality”, Aristotle separates them: matter, as potentiality, is distinguished from privation, as what is not. Further, matter is distinguished not only from privation but also from form. Since the ability to be distinguished, to be separated from, that is, to have its own nature, is the defining quality of substance, matter must, as we saw Aristotle note above, be substance in some sense.

So is matter substance or not? Again, the situation is complex. It is only in a certain sense, or to a certain degree, that the ultimate substrate/matter is nothing in its own right. As just shown, matter does have a nature of its own and is something “in its own right” (καθ' αὐτό): it is potentiality and primary substrate. As nothing in actuality, it is not a “this”, it is not an independent “thing” distinguished from other things. But as distinct from form, and thus from actuality, it is separable, and so matter is substance. Thus, Aristotle can say in *On the Soul* II.1 (412a6–9), “We say that substance is one kind of what is, and that in several senses: in the sense of matter or that which in itself is not a this, and in the sense of form or essence, which is that precisely in virtue of which a thing is called a this, and thirdly in the sense of that which is compounded of both.”⁴⁴ Matter is substance in that it is distinct from form, it is, *in its nature* not a this, that is, it is potentiality. But it is not a substance in that it is not a “this”, it has no actuality. Ultimately, it seems that matter is secondarily substance.

⁴³ Ibid., 328.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 656.

Regardless, however, one thing is clear: matter is governed and determined by Aristotle's understanding of substance insofar as it is separable and distinct.

One final aspect of Aristotle's metaphysics must be considered. It is necessary to examine Aristotle's First Principle: the Prime Mover/Self-Thinking Thought.⁴⁵ In *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).7 (1072a26), Aristotle describes the First Principle/Prime Mover as "eternal (αἰδιον), substance (οὐσία), and actuality (ἐνέργεια)".⁴⁶ Already, any relationality which might constitute the nature of Aristotle's First Principle becomes problematic, since the First Principle is described as "substance" and "actuality", which we have already seen are characterized essentially by separateness, independence, distinctness.⁴⁷ And in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).9 (1074b26), Aristotle, discussing the First Principle as Thought, says, "It thinks that which is most divine and precious, and it does not change."⁴⁸ Further, in (1074b33–35), Aristotle concludes, "Therefore it must be itself that thought thinks (since it is the most excellent of things), and thinking is a thinking on thinking."⁴⁹ Given this, The Divine *Nous* must think itself, since if this were not the case something else would be more divine than The Divine *Nous*, and this cannot be the case. So God, for Aristotle, is Thought Thinking Itself.

While it might seem that this brings relationality into the nature of The First Principle since Thought Thinking Itself certainly sounds relational (it even sounds Trinitarian—a *thinking* which *thinks* on *thinking*), Aristotle cuts off this avenue by insisting on the absolute unity of Self-thinking

⁴⁵ A problem, which is beyond the scope of the discussion here, is whether there is one Prime Mover or multiple prime movers and, if multiple, how are they related to one another. For a good examination of the question, see Elders, Leo, *Aristotle's Theology: A Commentary on Book Λ of the Metaphysics* (Assen: Koninklijke Van Gorcum and Company, 1972), 215 and Introduction VII. In view of Aristotle's claims in *Physics* VIII.6 (especially 259a14 ff. which states that the First Mover must be one and eternal) and his statements in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).6-7, it seems clear to me that whether there is one or many prime movers, Aristotle at least asserts that there is a *supreme* First Mover which is above the others. If this is wrong, then it bolsters the argument against any relationality in the First mover since there would be no single First Principle, but rather a multitude all distinct and separate in themselves.

⁴⁶ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1694.

⁴⁷ For a good discussion of knowledge as a characteristic of Aristotle's God, see De Koninck, Thomas, "Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself," *The Review of Metaphysics* 47, no. 3 (1994).

⁴⁸ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1698.

⁴⁹ Ibid. For the argument why this must be the case, see *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).9 (1074b25–35).

Thought. In (1074b35–36, 38), he asks whether thinker and the thing thought could be multiple, since “evidently knowledge and perception and opinion and understanding have always something else as their object, and themselves only by the way ... For being an act of thinking and being an object of thought are not the same.”⁵⁰ If this were to be the case with Aristotle’s First Principle, it might be possible to understand it relationally as being a unity which is both one and not one at the same time, but Aristotle explicitly denies this. In (1075a3–5), he states, “As, then, thought and the object of thought are not different in the case of things that have not matter, they will be the same (τὸ αὐτὸ), i.e., the thinking will be one with the object of its thought.”⁵¹ And in *On the Soul* III.4 (430a3–4), he asserts, “Thought is itself thinkable in exactly the same way as its objects are. For in the case of objects which involve no matter, what thinks and what is thought are identical (τὸ αὐτό).”⁵²

How it is that thinker and thought are the same in things which involve no matter? Why is matter relevant here? The passages in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).7 and 9 offer no explanation, but several considerations can help understand why matter cannot be involved in thought. In *On the Soul* III.4 (430a6–9) Aristotle notes, “In the case of those [objects] which contain matter each of the objects of thought is only potentially present. It follows that while they will not have thought in them (*for thought is a potentiality of them only in so far as they are capable of being disengaged from matter*) thought may yet be thinkable”⁵³ (emphasis added). From this, one can see that an object is only potentially an object of thought as long as it contains matter, and it can only be thought once disengaged from its matter.

But why is this the case? Several considerations are relevant here. One important consideration is that, according to Aristotle, matter *qua* matter is unintelligible. *Metaphysics* VII(Z).10 (1036a8–9) states, “Matter is

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 1699.

⁵² Ibid., 1: 683.

⁵³ Ibid.

unknowable in itself.”⁵⁴ Bradshaw, commenting on the passage just cited from *On the Soul*, states, “The statement that each of the things containing matter is potentially an object of thought is an allusion to Aristotle’s doctrine that the intelligible content of a thing resides in its form, matter *qua* matter being unintelligible ... This passage introduces the important restriction of the identity between intellect and its object to the case of things without matter.”⁵⁵ A second consideration is that matter, as has been shown, differentiates. The Prime Mover, Thought Thinking Itself, cannot be divided; it is indivisible. *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).7 (1073a5–7) states, “It has been shown also that this substance [the Prime Mover] cannot have any magnitude, but is without parts and indivisible (ἀδιαίρετός).”⁵⁶ As Elders notes, “A being which has no matter (like the human mind, and *a fortiori* the supreme nous) is itself indivisible. —Ἀδιαίρετος when applied to mind signifies that it has no parts and that its activity is one indivisible

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2: 1635. This passage, however, presents problems since Aristotle goes on to say, “And some matter is sensible and some intelligible, sensible matter being for instance bronze and wood and all matter that is changeable, and intelligible matter being that which is present in sensible things not *qua* sensible, i.e., in the objects of mathematics” (1036a9–11). What Aristotle means by “intelligible matter” is unclear. According to Reeve, “When a mathematician draws a particular equilateral triangle ABC in chalk on a blackboard, he uses it to represent an abstract particular equilateral triangle <ABC> whose sides are perfectly straight, exactly equal mathematical lines that have length but no breadth. <ABC> is a mathematical object. When he draws a second equilateral triangle DEF in order to prove that <ABC> and <DEF> are congruent, what distinguishes these two abstract mathematical triangles from each other is not their form or shape, which is the same in both, but their intelligible matters, which are different in each, and which are the abstract analogues <m₁> and <m₂> of the different parcels of perceptible matter, m₁ and m₂, consisting of chalk and areas of blackboard, that distinguish ABC from DEF, since these are also the same in form (Z 81034a5–8). <ABC> and <DEF> are particular abstract triangles, just as Callias and Socrates are particular non-abstract humans.” (Reeve, *Aristotle Metaphysics*, 429 n. 797.) Thus, intelligible matter seems to perform a differentiating function for abstract formal objects just as sensible matter does for physical objects. It must be noted, however, that this does not contradict Bradshaw’s claim that intelligibility resides in the form, and matter *qua* matter is unintelligible. Intelligible matter would only be intelligible insofar as it is formal. One might translate “intelligible” as “formal” and describe it as “formal matter”, in which case it is only in its formal capacity, that is, as a component of something formal, that it is intelligible; as matter and as potentiality, it is not. This should become clearer when we discuss potentiality as the essential reason matter cannot be an aspect of thought.

⁵⁵ Bradshaw, David, *Aristotle East and West: Metaphysics and the Division of Christendom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 34.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1695.

mental act.”⁵⁷ Since the Prime Mover/Divine *Nous* has no parts, and matter is what individuates and gives rise to parts, thought, especially divine thought, cannot contain matter. And finally, and most significantly, Thought Thinking Itself cannot contain matter because it is pure actuality, and matter is potentiality. *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).6 (1071b19–22) states, “There must, then, be such a principle [an eternal unmovable substance], whose very substance is actuality. Further, then, these substances must be without matter; for they must be eternal, at least if anything else is eternal. Therefore they must be actuality.”⁵⁸ It has already been seen in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).7 that the Prime Mover is “eternal, substance, and actuality”. De Koninck notes, “The primary cause [the Divine *Nous*] ... is substance, actuality and nothing but actuality.”⁵⁹ Olson states, “Actuality in the pure sense, admitting of no potency, is the epitome of being and substance: wholly self-sufficient, dependent on no other being, and unmoved. Because it would admit of no potency, such actuality would be non-sensible, necessary, eternal, and separate from natural things.”⁶⁰ Menn says, The Prime Mover/Divine *Nous* is “a ‘refined’ *nous* that is pure actuality, with all that implies ... Because it is always acting, and always acting in the same way, and always producing cosmic order, it is not a ‘principle’ of the world by being temporally prior to it, but by a causal and axiological and perhaps some kind of ontological priority.”⁶¹ Finally, Halper summarizes:

It is clear that the unmoved mover is thinkable in itself; for it is an actuality, a form without any matter; and matter cannot be thought. So, lacking matter, the unmoved mover should be most thinkable. The unmoved mover is a being of pure intelligibility, even if it cannot be comprehended fully by human thought, as we saw. Moreover, the unmoved mover is purely actual, and the actuality that exists without matter is thought. It seems plausible, then, that the unmoved mover is the intellect. This latter is not the human faculty of intellect, though our faculty does partake of it. Nor is the intellect a faculty of a higher being, say, God. Instead, Aristotle takes intellect to be a substance. The intellect thinks the object that is most thinkable and most

⁵⁷ Elders, *Aristotle's Theology: A Commentary on Book Λ of the Metaphysics*, 266.

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 2, 1693.

⁵⁹ De Koninck, “Aristotle on God as Thought Thinking Itself,” 485.

⁶⁰ Olson, R. Michael, “Aristotle on God: Divine *Nous* as Unmoved Mover,” in *Models of God and Alternative Ultimate Realities*, ed. Jeanine Diller and Asa Kashner (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 105.

⁶¹ Menn, Stephen, “Aristotle's Theology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 447.

worthy of being thought. Hence, the intellect thinks itself. In the *De Anima* Aristotle argues that we know a thing when its form comes to be in our minds or, better, when our minds come to be this form. In a sensible thing, form exists with matter; in our minds, it exists without matter. The intellect that Aristotle identifies as the unmoved mover also thinks an object without matter. The object most worthy of being thought is the object that lacks all matter, namely itself. Hence, the divine intellect that moves without itself being moved is thinking itself. As such, it is truly self-subsistent and, therefore, a substance. As Aristotle argues in *Λ.9*, if the divine intellect thinks about something better than itself, it is not most divine. If it thinks of something less than itself, it makes itself worse. If it changes, it would have to have a potentiality, but it is purely actual. Hence, the divine intellect can think only of itself. Evidently, the first cause is a thinking about thinking. The subject thinking is the same as the object thought. Even this distinction between subject and object does not exist in divine intellect, for if it did, this intellect would be a composite and thought would change in passing from one part to another.⁶²

From this it should be clear that the reason Aristotle's First Principle cannot contain matter, and that, as thought, it must be free of matter, is that it is pure actuality, and as pure actuality, it can contain no potentiality, and thus no matter. Being free of matter, it is also one and indivisible. And as substance, it is separate.⁶³ Aristotle, in *On the Soul* III.5 (430a17–18) notes, "Thought in this sense of it [Active Mind] is separable, impassible, unmixed, since it is in its essential nature activity."⁶⁴ These considerations show why, for Aristotle, it is impossible for matter to have any part in his First Principle.

Aristotle summarizes his account of the First Principle as Prime Mover and Self-thinking Thought in *Metaphysics* XII(Λ).7 (1072b10–30):

The first mover, then, of necessity exists; and in so far as it is necessary, it is good, and in this sense a first principle. For the necessary has all these

⁶² Halper, Edward, *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012), 104.

⁶³ As was shown in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).3, "both separability and individuality are thought to belong chiefly to substance." And Olson notes, "'Substance' refers to any being that possesses separable existence." (Olson, "Aristotle on God: Divine *Nous* as Unmoved Mover," 105.)

⁶⁴ Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, I, 684. "καὶ οὗτος ὁ νοῦς χωριστὸς καὶ ἀπαθὴς καὶ ἀμικτός, τῇ οὐσίᾳ ὧν ἐνέργεια"

senses—that which is necessary perforce because it is contrary to impulse, that without which the good is impossible, and that which cannot be otherwise but is *absolutely* necessary. On such a principle, then, depend the heavens and the world of nature. And its life is such as the best which we enjoy, and enjoy for but a short time. For it is ever in this state (which we cannot be), since its actuality is also pleasure. (And therefore waking, perception, and thinking are most pleasant, and hopes and memories are so because of their reference to these.) And thought in itself deals with that which is best in itself, and that which is thought in the fullest sense with that which is best in the fullest sense. And thought thinks itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e., the substance, is thought. And it is *active* when it *possesses* this object. Therefore the latter rather than the former is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state [contemplation] in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God’s essential actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God.⁶⁵ (emphases in the translation)

Again we see that “thought and object of thought are the same (τὸ αὐτὸν)”, but not in the sense that they are also different; God, the First Principle, is actuality, that is, the actuality of thought, which is life; and thought is understood in terms of substance, “that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e., the substance, is thought”. Aristotle’s First Principle is a unity, and not a differentiated unity, which would necessarily be characterized as Pure Relation, as we saw in the Neoplatonists. Aristotle’s First Principle is an unqualified one. He emphasizes this stating knower and the known are not only “one” (μία) but also “the same” (τὸ αὐτὸ). These considerations make clear that for Aristotle, even God is understood in terms of substance as one, separate, and independent, in which no relationality can exist. And this places Aristotle firmly in the line of Parmenidean thought. Just as Parmenides understood Being as One, simple, eternal, motionless, and changeless, so also Aristotle’s First Principle entails absolute unity, simplicity (i.e., indivisibility), eternality, motionlessness, and

⁶⁵ Ibid., 2: 1694–1696.

changelessness. And, it should be noted, as actuality form is also characterized by these traits.⁶⁶

To what degree then is Aristotle's ontology relational? It has been shown that the First Principle, God, cannot be Relation, since it is substance, actuality, eternal. Matter, however, complicates the issue. It merits and requires more detailed consideration precisely because as indeterminate, it would seem to entail the same primary relationality all ontological indefiniteness entails. But is it truly ontologically indefinite? While it is, in some sense, an indefinite ontological principle, that is, it is indefinite insofar as it is no particular thing "in itself", it nevertheless has a nature of its own, a nature which is distinct from other natures (at the very least those of form and privation). Thus, it is indefinite but not indefinite in an ontologically primordial way. Unlike the Neoplatonic First Principle which was indefinite definiteness and definite indefiniteness, ultimately, Aristotle's matter falls into definiteness. This is revealed by the fact that matter is not a First Principle. It is, rather, one of two principles of Being along with form.⁶⁷ But matter does not make things "what they are"; it does not give them their essence. It gives them individuation but not essence. To give something its essence falls to form, and form is in no way indefinite. Thus, matter and form are not ontological principles the way The Good and Indefinite Dyad are for Plato or the One and Indefinite Dyad are for Plotinus. Even though Aristotle does, as was shown, compare his understanding of matter to Plato's Indefinite Dyad, it is clear that he thinks Plato falls into error precisely because he, Plato, does not make the appropriate distinction within it: "For they got so far as to see that there must be some underlying nature, but they make it one—for even if one philosopher [i.e., Plato] makes a dyad of it, which he calls Great and Small, the effect is the same; for he overlooked the other nature."⁶⁸ Plato's Indefinite Dyad is truly indefinite, and being prior to Being, along with the Good, it is ontologically prior to determination and must be, as has been shown, purely relational. The same is true of the Indefinite Dyad in Plotinus for whom the Indefinite Dyad was simply the inherent relationality of the

⁶⁶ As noted in *Metaphysics* VII(Z).8 (1034a5–8), form is indivisible, which entails unity, and as Halper noted (Halper, *One and Many in Aristotle's Metaphysics: The Central Books*, 104.), change entails potentiality.

⁶⁷ It is true that in *Physics* I.9 Aristotle talks about a triad of principles and makes privation a principle along with matter and form, but this is not a principle of Being. It is instead a principle of change/becoming.

⁶⁸ *Physics* I.9 (192a9–12) (Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 1, 328).

Plotinian One. Because Aristotle is governed by the understanding of being/substance as separate and independent, and because this dominates his understanding of the principles which constitute beings, matter and form cannot be relational. They are essentially distinct and there is nothing ontologically that can unite them. Yes, Aristotle does say they combine, and they combine to generate sensible objects. But what is it that combines them? Aristotle has no answer to this. He cannot have an answer, because relation is ontologically posterior to the things related. Relation, however, this would occur, must be something added to them, but this means it could only be accidental to form and matter and not essential to them. Their distinction prevents them from being united in any ontologically meaningful way. In its indeterminateness, matter does call back to an ontological relationality, but in the end, it can only constitute a faint trace of the relationality which lies at the heart of the ontology of Plato and the Neoplatonists who came after him. And so Aristotle's matter is a vague remnant of relationality that disappears into the barren solitude of sharply defined Aristotelian substance. Form, in its essential "thisness", is not even a trace of this relationality. Neither is Aristotle's God.

THE SCHOLASTICS

Aristotle's influence on metaphysical thought can be seen throughout the Scholastic period. As Friedman notes, both St. Augustine of Hippo and Boethius—both of whom, in discussing the applicability of the Aristotelian categories to God, "claimed that only two categories can be said about God: substance and relation"—had a long-lasting impact on the Trinitarian understanding coming down through the Scholastic era.⁶⁹ The understanding of the Trinity as One in Substance and Three in Person/Relation becomes dominant. And while with this understanding the Trinity understood as both Three and One, as both One and Many, does not disappear, a tendency to emphasize the unity of God over his plurality nevertheless develops. As Adams notes, "The doctrine of divine simplicity is a centerpiece of medieval theology."⁷⁰ God's Unity, therefore, becomes central

⁶⁹ Friedman, Russell L., *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.

⁷⁰ Adams, Marilyn McCord, *William Ockham*, 2 vols. (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1987), 903.

and is understood in substantial terms, that is, as separate and distinct, while His plurality becomes subordinate to this unity.

This can be seen in two of the most prominent and important Scholastics. The first is St. Anselm of Canterbury, often called “the Father of Scholasticism”,⁷¹ whose famous argument for God’s existence entails that in order to be “whatever it is better to be than not to be”, God must be One. That He is also Three—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is asserted by St. Anselm, but even in this assertion the emphasis is on God’s radical unity, not His Threeness.⁷² God must be One, while His Threeness is incidental and mysterious. The other is St. Thomas Aquinas who emphasizes God’s unity over His Threeness by emphasizing His simplicity. This is clear from Aquinas’ assertion that God is “the primary and simple substance”.⁷³ As Cross states, “Simplicity, again, is the controlling idea at the heart of Aquinas’s philosophical theology.”⁷⁴ And Thom notes, “Aquinas’s treatment of divinity flows out of his understanding of divine simplicity.”⁷⁵

This continues in the later Scholasticism of Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. Like Aquinas and St. Anselm before him, Scotus sees God primarily as simple stating, “The First Nature [God] is in itself simple. I have said ‘in itself’ because I have an understanding here only of essential simplicity, which absolutely excludes all composition in essence.”⁷⁶ And Ockham cannot help but be bound by substance ontology since by his nominalism he identifies only individuals as existing. This requires that he identify One with Being, making unity an attribute of Being itself.⁷⁷ For Ockham, therefore, God is absolutely simple, His simplicity even

⁷¹ Rosemann, *Understanding Scholastic Thought with Foucault*, 47. Grant also names St. Anselm as “the Father of Scholasticism”. (Grant, Edward, *God and Reason in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 56.)

⁷² See *Proslogion*, Ch. 23.

⁷³ St. Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, trans. Armand Maurer, Second ed. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1968), 33.

⁷⁴ Cross, Richard, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 45.

⁷⁵ Thom, Paul, *The Logic of the Trinity: Augustine to Ockham* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 130.

⁷⁶ Duns Scotus, John, *The De Primo Principio of John Duns Scotus*, trans. Evan Roche (St. Bonaventure: The Franciscan Institute, 1949; repr., Kessinger’s Legacy Reprints), 73.

⁷⁷ See, for example, William of Ockham, *Ockham’s Theory of Terms: Part I of the Summa Logicae*, trans. Michael J. Loux (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), 124.

becoming the starting point to discuss God's infinity.⁷⁸ Thus, Friedman notes, "For him [Ockham] God's essence is absolutely simple and indistinct."⁷⁹ And Adams states, "With Aquinas and Scotus, Ockham affirms divine simplicity in sense (A) [i.e., God 'has no components of any sort']."⁸⁰

Hence, Aristotle's understanding of substance influences the Scholastics in their emphasis on God's essential unity over His Threeness. They understand unity in substantial terms, in opposition to, distinct and separate from, His Threeness, and by doing so they engender an ontological separation between the source of Being and beings, between Creator and creature. This ontological separation reaches a crisis point in Descartes.

DESCARTES AND THE CARTESIAN CRISIS

Descartes marks a revolution in the history of philosophy, signaling an "epistemological turn"⁸¹ that refocuses philosophical inquiry from the metaphysical onto the epistemological. This shift initiates the transition into the modern era, leading to Descartes' designation as the "father" and "founder" of modern philosophy.⁸² As Wilson states, "It is a commonplace of the history of philosophy that Descartes initiated the modern era by placing the critique of knowledge at the forefront of philosophical inquiry. That is, he accorded the questions 'How can I know?' and 'How can I be certain?' priority over questions about the nature of reality."⁸³ This shift to epistemology as the primary focus of philosophy has, however, unfortunate results. Rorty states, "The problem of getting from

⁷⁸William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso and Francis E. Kelley (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 632–635.

⁷⁹Friedman, *Medieval Trinitarian Thought from Aquinas to Ockham*, 125.

⁸⁰Adams, *William Ockham*, 941.

⁸¹Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and the Mirror of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 139.

⁸²Cf. Lennon, Thomas M., *The Plain Truth: Descartes, Huet, and Skepticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 158. and Russell, Bertrand, *The History of Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2004), 598.

⁸³Wilson, Margaret Dauler, *Descartes* (London: Routledge, 1978), 194. She goes on, however, to argue that this is "at least partly" misleading, since "Cartesian doubt is very much in the service of certain fundamentally metaphysical convictions about God, self and nature" (ibid.). Nevertheless, while Descartes himself might not have seen his philosophy in this hyper-epistemologically focused light, the effect of his philosophy has precisely this result and impacts all of philosophical history after him.

inner space to outer space—the ‘problem of the external world’ ... became paradigmatic for modern philosophy.” This problem, central to the modern project, remains unresolved for a substance ontological approach and so leads to a solipsistic relation of the rational subject to a putatively objective world. As Rorty again notes, “Ever since Descartes made methodological solipsism the mark of rigorous and professional philosophical thinking, philosophers have wanted to find the ‘ground’ of cognition.”⁸⁴

This radical distinction between the subjective and objective worlds arises from Descartes’ inheritance of a substance ontological approach to metaphysics. If it is recalled that for Aristotle both form and matter are substances, and substance is understood in terms of unity and independence, it becomes clear that there is already an ontological dissociation between soul/form and body/matter for Aristotle. Thus, the origins of this unfortunate divorce of mind from body lie in the metaphysical assumptions of substance ontology which Descartes inherits from Aristotle through the Scholastics and which form the heart of Descartes’ philosophy. Clark states, “Scholastic philosophers had divided all realities into two classes, substances and accidents. They used the word ‘accident’ for qualities of things, such as the colour of a cat or the shape of a tree. It would not make sense to think of a colour as existing on its own, without being the colour of something or other. By contrast, they applied the word ‘substance’ to things that are not necessarily predicated of other things and that could be thought of as existing on their own.”⁸⁵ And he further notes, “Descartes continued to use the traditional scholastic language of substances.”⁸⁶ Secada states, “Substances are Descartes’s fundamental entities. At a most abstract level the question ‘what is there?’ is answered ‘substances’. Substances are well defined things which can be determinately counted. They are the basic and independent things that there are.”⁸⁷ And he adds, “Descartes refers to substance as what exists *per se*” and “Descartes explains that something exists *per se* when it needs nothing but itself in order to exist.”⁸⁸ Descartes himself asserts, “A stone is a

⁸⁴ Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of the World*, 191.

⁸⁵ Clarke, Desmond M., *Descartes A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 222.

⁸⁶ Clarke, Desmond M., *Descartes’s Theory of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 208.

⁸⁷ Secada, Jorge, *Cartesian Metaphysics: The Late Scholastic Origins of Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 183.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

substance, that is to say, a thing that is suitable for existing in itself.”⁸⁹ And finally, Descartes states, “Now I must declare how it is that from the mere fact that I could clearly and distinctly understand one substance without the other, I am certain that the one excludes the other. My explanation is that the very notion of a substance is just this: what can exist in its own right [*per se*], that is, without the help of any other substance. Nor has anyone who perceives two substances by means of two different concepts failed to judge them to be really distinct.”⁹⁰ Thus, the substance ontology the Scholastics inherited from Aristotle in which the existence of things entails their existence in themselves as distinct, one, and independent lies at the heart of Descartes’ metaphysical understanding. So much is this the case that Descartes fundamentally reduces substances to two types: *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. In *Principles of Philosophy* II.1, Descartes defines the body or matter as *res extensa*: “It is this extended thing [*res extensa*] that we call ‘body’ or ‘matter’.”⁹¹ And in *Principles of Philosophy* II.2, he correspondingly defines mind as *res cogitans*: “The mind is aware that these sensations do not come from itself alone, and that they cannot belong to it simply in virtue of its being a thinking thing [*res cogitans*].”⁹² It is the failure to bridge the gap between these two substances that leads inevitable to a solipsistic metaphysic and epistemology.

Descartes, of course, did not recognize his approach as solipsistic. For Descartes, the existence of God, and the ability to know God with presumed Cartesian certainty, guarantees the existence and knowledge of the external world. As Wilson states, “Descartes is, then, so far from concluding rashly from what he can conceive to what is the case, that he even finds it necessary to present God as a bridge from what he can *distinctly* conceive to what is the case”⁹³ (emphasis in the original). And Grene notes, “Only God’s existence as non-deceiver, however, can guarantee that our clear and distinct ideas be true in the full sense of that term. All those principles about causality, ideas and so on are perfectly permissible within

⁸⁹ Descartes, René, *Meditations. Objections, and Replies*, trans. Roger Ariew and Donald Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2006), 24.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 135.

⁹¹ Descartes, René, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 223.

⁹² Ibid., 224.

⁹³ Wilson, Margaret D., “Descartes: The Epistemological Argument for Mind-Body Distinctness,” *Noûs* 10, no. 1 (1976): 6.

consciousness. Only through God's guarantee, however, do they yield metaphysical truths about a substantial world."⁹⁴

It is the failure of Descartes' argument for God and the corresponding collapse of this putative bridge between the subjective world of my mind and the objective world of external reality that creates both a metaphysical and epistemological crisis which is ultimately recognized by Nietzsche.

CONSEQUENCES: NIETZSCHE

Nietzsche does not believe that he is creating a solipsistic philosophy in which objective reality has disappeared; he believes this disappearance occurred long ago. All that remains is to recognize it for what it is. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche offers his account of the disappearance of objective reality:

How the "True World" Finally Became a Fable
The History of an Error

1. The true world—attainable for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, *he is it*. (The oldest form of the idea, relatively sensible, simple, and persuasive. A circumlocution for the sentence, "I, Plato, *am* the truth.")
2. The true world—unattainable for now, but promised for the sage, the pious, the virtuous man ("for the sinner who repents"). (Progress of the idea: it becomes more subtle, insidious, incomprehensible—*it becomes female*, it becomes Christian.)
3. The true world—unattainable, indemonstrable, unpromisable; but the very thought of it--a consolation, an obligation, an imperative. (At bottom, the old sun, but seen through mist and skepticism. The idea has become elusive, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian.)
4. The true world—unattainable? At any rate, unattained. And being unattained, also *unknown*. Consequently, not consoling, redeeming, or obligating: how could something unknown obligate us? (Gray morning. The first yawn of reason. The cockcrow of positivism.)
5. The "true" world—an idea which is no longer good for anything, not even obligating--an idea which has become useless and superfluous—*consequently*, a refuted idea: let us abolish it! (Bright day; breakfast; return of *bon sens* and cheerfulness; Plato's embarrassed blush; pandemonium of all free spirits.)

⁹⁴Grene, Marjorie, *Descartes* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 16.

6. The true world—we have abolished. What world has remained? The apparent one perhaps? But no! *With the true world we have also abolished the apparent one.* (Noon; moment of the briefest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIT ZARATHUSTRA.)⁹⁵ (emphasis in the original)

Here Nietzsche shows a historical progression as the “true world” moves through stages from united with the subject in Plato; to separated from but still attainable for the subject in Christianity; to Kant’s unattainable “noumenal” world; to finally perhaps remaining but being unknowable it is also thereby irrelevant; to refuted and ready for abolition; to abolished along with even the apparent world.⁹⁶ This last stage is critical. While philosophers such as Kant and Husserl tried to hold onto some level of objectivity by rendering the subject universal, Nietzsche here recognizes that even this will not hold. This is, ultimately, the central point of Nietzsche’s famous Madman parable in *The Gay Science* §125:

The madman.—Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place and cried incessantly: “I seek God! I seek God!”—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. “Whither is God?” he cried. “I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I! All of us are his murderers! But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? And backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we not hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition?—Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead!

⁹⁵Nietzsche, Friedrich, “Twilight of the Idols,” in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 485–486.

⁹⁶It may be true that Nietzsche fails to recognize the ontological foundation for the disappearance of objective reality; nevertheless, his discernment of the simple fact of its disappearance and its consequences demonstrates a profoundly insightful grasp on the situation in his time.

And we have killed him! How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives,—who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed,—and whoever is born after us, for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto!”— Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners: they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern to the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. “I have come too early,” he said then; “my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering—it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—and yet they have done it themselves!”— It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: “What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?”⁹⁷ (emphasis in the original)

Without any standard of measurement, there is no up or down, forward or backward, left or right. There is no objective direction; no objective light by which we can be guided. All objectivity is lost. But this also includes any objectivity which might be in the subject. Lackey states, “In killing God and His crown of creation, Nietzsche does not become the quintessential nihilist; rather, he becomes, to his mind, the first sane voice crying in the intellectual wilderness: make way the coming of a new human, a ‘subject’ which can only become a ‘self’ when it paradoxically learns to overcome its very constructed ‘self.’”⁹⁸ This means that man, in order to truly be, must create himself or as Nietzsche puts it, “‘give style’ to one’s character”.⁹⁹ Nietzsche, therefore, recognizes that anything that can ground objective reality, even the objectivity of the subject, has been lost. Literally no thing remains.

Into the midst of this crisis steps Heidegger.

⁹⁷Nietzsche, “The Gay Science,” 95–96.

⁹⁸Lackey, Michael, “Killing God, Liberating the ‘Subject’: Nietzsche and Post-God Freedom,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 737.

⁹⁹Nietzsche, “The Gay Science,” 98.

PART III

Ἐπιστροφή: Re-turn



CHAPTER 5

Heidegger

NIETZSCHE: THE END OF METAPHYSICS AND A NEW HOPE

In Nietzsche's proclamation, "God is dead", Heidegger recognizes both the ontological nihilism it entails and the historical destiny it fulfills. In the essay, "The Word of Nietzsche: 'God is Dead'", Heidegger addresses the ontological aspect of Nietzsche's nihilism:

The terms 'God' and 'Christian god' in Nietzsche's thinking are used to designate the supra sensory world in general. God is the name for the realm of Ideas and ideals. This realm of the suprasensory has been considered since Plato, or more strictly speaking, since the late Greek and Christian interpretation of Platonic philosophy, to be the true and genuinely real world. In contrast to it the sensory world is only the world down here, the changeable, and therefore the merely apparent, unreal world. The world down here is the vale of tears in contrast to the mountain of everlasting bliss in the beyond. If, as still happens in Kant, we name the sensory world the physical in the broader sense, then the suprasensory world is the metaphysical world.¹

Within this metaphysical framework then, "The pronouncement 'God is dead' means: The suprasensory world is without effective power. It bestows no life. Metaphysics, i.e., for Nietzsche Western philosophy

¹ Heidegger, Martin, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1977), 61.

understood as Platonism, is at an end.”² For Heidegger this means that the history of metaphysical thought has culminated in nihilism: “Nietzsche’s thinking sees itself as belonging under the heading ‘nihilism.’ That is the name for a historical movement, recognized by Nietzsche, already ruling throughout preceding centuries, and now determining this century.”³ In what, however, does this nihilism consist of? A loss of objective metaphysical reality? Certainly it is that, but it is more. It is a devastation of values. In *Nietzsche*, Heidegger states, “By nihilism Nietzsche means the historical development, i.e., event, that the uppermost values devalue themselves, that all goals are annihilated, and that all estimates of value collide against one another.”⁴ Thus, “The word of Nietzsche [‘God is dead’] speaks of the destining of two millennia of Western history.”⁵ But this destining is one in which “there is no longer any goal in and through which all the forces of the historical existence of peoples can cohere and in the direction of which they can develop.”⁶

Heidegger does not believe, however, that this devastation, this loss of Being, is simply an accident of history; rather, nihilism arises out of the very nature of Being itself. Heidegger states: “But if the essence of nihilism lies in history, so that the truth of Being remains wanting in the appearing of whatever is as such, in its entirety, and if, accordingly, Nothing is befalling Being and its truth, then metaphysics as the history of the truth of what is as such, is, in its essence, nihilism.”⁷ In other words, if it is the case that beings, in their appearance, hide the nature of Being itself, then beings, in the very concealing of Being itself within them, hide the Truth of Being by their very appearing. Thus, in the appearing of entities, that is, that which is as such, Being itself appears as Nothing, that is, it remains hidden. To say that “Nothing befalls Being” means that Being hides in the appearing of beings. In this way the history of metaphysics is the history of a nihilism in that Being conceals itself within the very entities through which it appears. Heidegger explains,

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 57.

⁴ Heidegger, Martin, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperOne, 1991), 156–157.

⁵ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 58.

⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, 157.

⁷ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 109.

Thought from out of the destining of Being, the *nihil* in “nihilism” means that Nothing is befalling Being. Being is not coming into the light of its own essence. In the appearing of whatever is as such, Being itself remains wanting. The truth of Being falls from memory. It remains forgotten. Thus nihilism would be in its essence a history that runs its course along with Being itself. It would lie in Being's own essence, then, that Being remain unthought because it withdraws. Being itself withdraws into its truth. It harbors itself safely within its truth and conceals itself in such harboring.⁸

In its essence, therefore, nihilism is Being's own withdrawal into itself. It arises because Being remains hidden in the appearance of entities, that is, “the appearing of whatever is as such”. Being remains hidden in the appearance of beings.

This understanding of Being, nihilism, and their interrelation remains a project to be realized, however; it remains to be thought. Although Nietzsche did experience “some characteristics of nihilism”, according to Heidegger, he, Nietzsche, was blinded to the essence of nihilism, since he “expressed them [these characteristics] nihilistically”, and therefore, “Nietzsche never recognized the essence of nihilism, just as no metaphysics before him ever did.”⁹ As Behler notes, “According to Heidegger, Nietzsche revealed the meaninglessness of this event [the death of God] but was unable to bring himself out of it. The opening he had created was immediately blocked by the acceptance of the will to power and the eternal recurrence of the same, which prevented him from uncovering the truth of Being.”¹⁰ The ultimate effect of this for Heidegger is that Being in its essence, its essence which is nihilism properly understood as the self-concealing of Being, has itself been left unthought. It has been passed over, and “Through this passing over we are, without noticing it, constantly accomplishing the killing in relation to the Being of whatever is in being.”¹¹

While Behler may be right that Nietzsche's “assessment is also for Heidegger the most concise and consequential summary of the

⁸ Ibid., 109–110.

⁹ Ibid., 109.

¹⁰ Behler, Ernst, “Nietzsche in the Twentieth Century,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 314.

¹¹ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 111.

meaninglessness of previous Western metaphysics"¹²; there is, nevertheless, hope. Heidegger states, "In looking toward this self-concealing harboring of its own essence, perhaps we glimpse the essence of that mystery in the guise of which the truth of Being is coming to presence."¹³ Heidegger concludes the essay on Nietzsche's "Word":

For these men [the men in the marketplace] are not unbelievers because God as God has to them become unworthy of belief, but rather because they themselves have given up the possibility of belief, inasmuch as they are no longer able to seek God. They can no longer seek because they no longer think. Those standing about in the market place have abolished thinking and replaced it with idle babble that scents nihilism in every place in which it supposes its own opinion to be endangered. This self-deception, forever gaining the upper hand in relation to genuine nihilism, attempts in this way to talk itself out of its anguished dread in the face of thinking. But that dread is dread in the face of dread. The madman, on the contrary, is clearly, according to the first, and more clearly still according to the last, sentences of the passage, for him who can hear, the one who seeks God, since he cries out after God. Has a thinking man perhaps here really cried out *de profundis*? And the ear of our thinking, does it still not hear the cry? It will refuse to hear it so long as it does not begin to think.¹⁴

What is needed, therefore, is to think Being which has hitherto been unthought. What is needed is to begin to seek God.

Nietzsche's nihilism, therefore, results from an essential misunderstanding of the nature of Being, and although this misunderstanding is not here laid explicitly at the feet of substance ontology, as will become clear below, it is the traditional ontology of substance which obscures the true nature of Being and annihilates the very means of its investigation. Still, in the foregoing discussion Heidegger recognizes the devastation resulting from Nietzsche's nihilism, a devastation which renders it impossible for men to believe or seek Being, because it has rendered it impossible for them to think Being. Yet even though this is where the history of metaphysics has led, there is, nevertheless, a hope. There is a truth about Being reflected in nihilism, and there is, therefore, a way forward. That way forward is to once again become men who think, and think the Truth of Being. The explanation of this Truth of Being, as Heidegger understands it, lies yet ahead.

¹² Behler, "Nietzsche in the Twentieth Century," 314.

¹³ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 110.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

BACKGROUND: THE PROBLEM OF THE QUESTION OF BEING

As is well-known, Husserl had a profound impact on Heidegger. Safranski notes, “His [Husserl’s] *Logical Investigations*, published exactly at the turn of the century, became a personal cult book for Heidegger.”¹⁵ Heidegger himself states, “I remained so fascinated by Husserl’s work [*Logical Investigations*] that I read in it again and again in the years to follow without gaining sufficient insight into what fascinated me. The spell emanating from the work extended to the outer appearance of the sentence structure and the title page.”¹⁶ And Frede declares, “Husserl’s phenomenology clearly (and with Heidegger’s acknowledgment) already formed the background of Heidegger’s critique of psychologism.”¹⁷ As time went on, however, Heidegger began to see the shortcomings of Husserl’s phenomenology. As Frede again notes, “it was these shortcomings that guided him on the way to the ideas he developed in *Being and Time*.”¹⁸ Heidegger’s phenomenological approach comes to differ from Husserl’s, she explains, in that “he did not think that phenomena can simply be read off from the way they are given in acts of consciousness. Rather, they have to be unearthed as that which might be only implicitly contained in our understanding. So Heidegger was looking at the phenomena behind the surface appearances—at what lies hidden behind what we find familiar and regard as natural ‘in the first approach and for the most part,’ as he expresses it.”¹⁹ As Heidegger himself explains, “‘phenomenology’ means ἀποφαίνεσθαι τὰ φαινόμενα—let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from

¹⁵ Safranski, Rüdiger, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. Ewald Osers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 25.

¹⁶ Heidegger, Martin, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972), 75.

¹⁷ Frede, Dorothea, “The Question of Being: Heidegger’s Project,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 51. Caputo points out that “psychologism” is understood as “the attempt to found logic and mathematics on the psychological makeup of the human mind” (Caputo, John D., “Heidegger and Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 271).

¹⁸ Frede, “The Question of Being: Heidegger’s Project,” 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

itself.”²⁰ And he defines “phenomenon” as “*that which shows itself in itself, the manifest*.”²¹ Thus, he concludes,

What is it that phenomenology is to ‘let us see’? What is it that must be called a ‘phenomenon’ in a distinctive sense? What is it that by its very essence is *necessarily* the theme whenever we exhibit something *explicitly*? Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground.²²

With this approach, Heidegger seeks, as Safranski notes, “to concede independent reality to the external world. It should not evaporate into a chimera of the subjective spirit.”²³ This “independent reality” is not, however, to be understood in substantial terms. Substance cannot be the ultimate ontological ground.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that because it has been forgotten, recovering the “question of Being” is the task at hand: “It [[the question of Being]] is one which provided a stimulus for the researches of Plato and Aristotle, only to subside from then on *as a theme for actual investigation*.”²⁴ Why has it been forgotten? It has been forgotten because the question was never on solid ontological grounds. While Plato and Aristotle were able to make some ontological contributions, Heidegger states that “what they

²⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 58. In quotes from *Being and Time*, all emphases will be in the translation and/or original unless otherwise stated.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²² *Ibid.*, 59.

²³ Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, 39. Gilson also notes that Heidegger is moving beyond Husserl’s Transcendental Ego, “the absolutizing of the cogito”, and, using the language of Heidegger’s comments on Nietzsche, states, “His [Heidegger’s] impulse is to attain the nonappearing essence of the appearing totality of what-is, or, the Worldhood (Being) of the World, the presencing and essencing of Being, evoked necessarily from Nothing, as phenomenological phenomenon.” (Gilson, Caitlin Smith, *The Metaphysical Presuppositions of Being-in-the-World: A Confrontation between St. Thomas Aquinas and Heidegger* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group Inc., 2010), 94.)

²⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 21. In order to avoid confusion with Macquarrie and Robinson, who use single brackets to indicate their insertions, in all quotations from *Being and Time* I will use double brackets to indicate my insertions.

wrested with the utmost intellectual effort from the phenomena” was only “fragmentary and incipient”.²⁵ He goes on:

On the basis of the Greeks’ initial contributions towards an Interpretation of Being, a dogma has been developed which not only declares the question about the meaning of Being to be superfluous, but sanctions its complete neglect. It is said that ‘Being’ is the most universal and the emptiest of concepts. As such it resists every attempt at definition. Nor does this most universal and hence indefinable concept require any definition, for everyone uses it constantly and already understands what he means by it. In this way, that which the ancient philosophers found continually disturbing as something obscure and hidden has taken on a clarity and self-evidence such that if anyone continues to ask about it he is charged with an error of method. At the beginning of our investigation it is not possible to give a detailed account of the presuppositions and prejudices which are constantly reimplanting and fostering the belief that an inquiry into Being is unnecessary. They are rooted in ancient ontology itself.²⁶

What is it in the ancient ontology that gives rise to this declaration of Being’s empty universality, this problem of Being by which it cannot even be investigated? It is the understanding of Being as substance.

Heidegger, while critiquing Descartes, offers the traditional definition of substance: “Substantiality is the idea of Being to which the ontological characterization of the *res extensa* harks back. ‘*Per substantiam nihil aliud intelligere possumus, quam rem quae ita existit, ut nulla alia re indigeat ad existendum.*’ ‘By substance we can understand nothing else than an entity which is in such a way that it needs no other entity in order to *be*.’ The Being of a ‘substance’ is characterized by not needing anything.”²⁷ But, “That whose Being is such that it has no need at all for any other entity satisfies the idea of substance in the authentic sense; this entity is the *ens perfectissimum* [[Perfect Being]]”, or “God”.²⁸ He continues:

Here ‘God’ is a purely ontological term, if it is to be understood as *ens perfectissimum*. At the same time, the ‘self-evident’ connotation of the concept of God is such as to permit an ontological interpretation for the characteristic of not needing anything—a constitutive item in substantiality. ‘*Alias vero*

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 21–22.

²⁷ Ibid., 125.

²⁸ Ibid.

omnes <res>, non nisi ope concursus Dei existere posse percipimus.’ [[‘Indeed we perceive that other things cannot exist without the help of God’s concurrence’]] All entities other than God need to be ‘produced’ in the widest sense and also to be sustained. ‘Being’ is to be understood within a horizon which ranges from the production of what is to be present-at-hand to something which has no need of being produced. Every entity which is not God is an *ens creatum*. The Being which belongs to one of these entities is ‘infinitely’ different from that which belongs to the other; yet we still consider creation and creator alike *as entities*. We are thus using ‘Being’ in so wide a sense that its meaning embraces an ‘infinite’ difference. So even created entities can be called ‘substance’ with some right. Relative to God, of course, these entities need to be produced and sustained; but within the realm of created entities—the ‘world’ in the sense of *ens creatum*—there are things which ‘are in need of no other entity’ relatively to the creaturely production and sustentation that we find, for instance, in man. Of these substances there are two kinds: the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*. The Being of that substance whose distinctive *proprietas* is presented by *extensio* thus becomes definable in principle ontologically if we clarify the *meaning* of Being which is ‘common’ to the three kinds of substances, one of them infinite [[God]], the others both finite [[man and entities]].²⁹

Because “substance” applies to things between which “there is an *infinite* difference of Being”,³⁰ it becomes too broad, too universal. It applies to things that are too different to be explained by the same expression. It is not difficult to see then how the question of Being became impossible to investigate: Being itself, understood as substance, is so vague as to be meaningless. This is what Heidegger means when he states, “The meaning [[of Being]] remains unclarified because it is held to be ‘self-evident’.”³¹ And earlier he notes, “it is held that ‘Being’ is of all concepts the one that is self-evident. Whenever one cognizes anything or makes an assertion, whenever one comports oneself towards entities, even towards oneself, some use is made of ‘Being’; and this expression is held to be intelligible ‘without further ado’, just as everyone understands ‘The sky *is* blue’, ‘I *am* merry’, and the like.”³² This reflects two problems with the way “Being” is commonly used, which lead to the forgetfulness of the question of Being. First, because it is applied thoughtlessly to such an infinitely

²⁹ Ibid., 125–126. Translation of the Latin by Macquarrie and Robinson.

³⁰ Ibid., 126.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 23.

different range of things, it becomes hopelessly vague and abstract, and this leads to its indefinability. The question of Being cannot be asked or investigated because the concept of Being is too broadly used. No definition, no answer to the question, can be adequate to cover all cases of its use. The second problem is that the very fact of its universal and overly common usage leads us to believe we already understand what it means. How could it be used so often if its definition was not comprehended? This is, however, as Heidegger notes, “an average kind of intelligibility, which merely demonstrates that this is unintelligible. It makes manifest that in any way of comporting oneself towards entities as entities—even in any Being towards entities as entities—there lies *a priori* an enigma. The very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again.”³³ In other words, the very fact that “Being” is used so broadly and univocally of such an infinite variety of entities indicates that its true meaning remains hidden. Because substance becomes infinite in its designations, it becomes absolutely universal and incapable of definition and thereby inappropriate for investigation. Since Being is understood to simply be substance, the question of Being is forgotten; substance ontology obscures the true nature of Being.

While the above considerations are certainly true and problematic for the question of Being and naturally obscure it, the idea of substance as that which lies at the root of the problem seems accidental here at best. It may be that the problem is “rooted in ancient ontology itself”, but only because ancient ontology happened to understand Being as substance and use it in an extremely broad and abstract manner. Thus, the problems revealed above are not unique to the idea of substance itself. They would arise when any term is used of Being too broadly and commonly. In fact, the very use of the term “Being” to refer both to the ground of beings, that is, that which is common to all entities, as well as that which makes a being what it is, is problematic. There is, and must be, a fundamental ontological difference between what Heidegger calls “the Being of beings” and “the beings of Being”. Heidegger states,

We see that *Being* means always and everywhere: the Being of *beings*. The genitive in this phrase is to be taken as a *genitivus objectivus*. *Beings* means always and everywhere the beings *of Being*; here the genitive is to be taken

³³ Ibid.

as a *genitivus subjectivus*. It is, however, with certain reservations that we speak of a genitive in respect to object and subject, because these terms, subject and object, in their turn stem from a particular character of Being. Only this much is clear, that when we deal with the Being of beings and with the beings of Being, we deal in each case with a difference. Thus we think of Being rigorously only when we think of it in its difference with beings, and of beings in their difference with Being. The difference thus comes specifically into view. If we try to form a representational idea of it, we will at once be misled into conceiving of difference as a relation which our representing has added to Being and to beings. Thus the difference is reduced to a distinction, something made up by our understanding (*Verstand*).³⁴ (italicized emphases in the original; underlined emphasis added)

And he later adds, “Because Being appears as ground, beings are what is grounded.”³⁵ This difference between Being as ground and beings as grounded is not something we add by our “representing”; rather, it is always already there: “Whenever we come to the place to which we were supposedly first bringing difference along as an alleged contribution, we always find that Being and beings in their difference are already there.”³⁶ Thus, there is and must be an ontological difference between Being, as the ontological ground of beings, and entities, as that which is grounded. By designating both God, that is, the Highest Being and ground of Being, and entities as substance, the difference between them is obscured, and the question of Being is lost.³⁷

There is, however, a deeper and more profound problem in understanding Being as substance—a problem which arises from the very nature of substance itself. Heidegger understands the notion of substance in terms of what he calls presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*). Heidegger states, “The interpretation of Being takes its orientation in the first instance from the Being of entities within-the-world ... , and entities are first conceived as a context of Things (*res*) which are present-at-hand. ‘*Being*’

³⁴ Heidegger, Martin, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1969), 61–62.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁷ As we will see when we discuss relationality in Heidegger’s later works—of which *Identity and Difference* is one—this difference which exists between Being and beings entails a fundamental ontological relationality. Beings are united in Being while at the same time the difference is maintained. In this very difference, therefore, an ontological relationality occurs in which Being and beings are one and separate.

acquires the meaning of ‘Reality’. Substantiality becomes the basic characteristic of Being.”³⁸ This understanding of Being as substance forms the basis of Heidegger’s criticism of both Descartes and Kant. Regarding Descartes, Heidegger states,

Descartes ... continued ... to accept a completely indefinite ontological status for the *res cogitans sive mens sive animus* [‘the thing which cognizes, whether it be a mind or spirit’]: he regarded this entity as a *fundamentum inconcussum* [[*unshakable foundation*]], and applied the medieval ontology to it in carrying through the fundamental considerations of his *Meditationes*. He defined the *res cogitans* ontologically as an *ens*; and in the medieval ontology the meaning of Being for such an *ens* had been fixed by understanding it as an *ens creatum* [[i.e., as a present-at-hand entity]].³⁹

He later notes, “He [[Descartes]] prescribes for the world its ‘real’ Being, as it were, on the basis of an idea of Being whose source has not been unveiled and which has not been demonstrated in its own right—an idea in which Being is equated with constant presence-at-hand ... *The problem of how to get appropriate access to entities within-the-world is one which Descartes feels no need to raise*”⁴⁰ (emphasis added). And in spite of moving beyond Descartes in important ways, Kant follows Descartes lock-step in embracing the mistaken ontology of substance. Heidegger states,

Kant took over Descartes’ position quite dogmatically, notwithstanding all the essential respects in which he had gone beyond him ... In taking over Descartes’ ontological position Kant made an essential omission: he failed to provide an ontology of Dasein. This omission was a decisive one in the spirit [im Sinne] of Descartes’ ownmost tendencies. With the ‘*cogito sum*’ Descartes had claimed that he was putting philosophy on a new and firm footing. But what he left undetermined when he began in this ‘radical’ way, was the kind of Being which belongs to the *res cogitans*, or-more precisely-the *meaning of the Being of the ‘sum’*.⁴¹

And later:

³⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 245.

³⁹ Ibid., 46. My Latin translation.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 129.

⁴¹ Ibid., 45, 46.

Kant's analysis has two positive aspects. For one thing, he sees the impossibility of ontically reducing the "I" to a substance; for another thing, he holds fast to the "I" as 'I think'. Nevertheless, he takes this "I" as subject again, and he does so in a sense which is ontologically inappropriate. For the ontological concept of the subject *characterizes not the Selfhood of the "I" qua Self, but the selfsameness and steadiness of something that is always present-at-hand*. To define the "I" ontologically as "*subject*" means to regard it as something always present-at-hand. The Being of the "I" is understood as the Reality of the *res cogitans*.⁴²

And as Heidegger makes clear in a note on this passage, "in taking the ontological character of the personal Self as something '*substantial*', Kant has still kept basically within the horizon of the inappropriate ontology of what is present-at-hand within-the-world."⁴³ Why, though, is substance an "inappropriate ontology"? Why does it give rise to a "problem of how to get appropriate access to entities within-the-world"?

We have already seen that substance ontology is problematic in that it obscures the question of Being, but substance ontology is also a problem in its own right. The idea of substance itself is problematic. Heidegger states:

Being-in is distinct from the present-at-hand insideness of something present-at-hand 'in' something else that is present-at-hand; Being-in is not a characteristic that is effected, or even just elicited, in a present-at-hand subject by the 'world's' Being-present-at-hand; Being-in is rather an essential kind of Being of this entity itself. But in that case, what else is presented with this phenomenon than the *commercium* which is present-at-hand *between* a subject present-at-hand and an Object present-at-hand? Such an interpretation would come closer to the phenomenal content if we were to

⁴² Ibid., 367. This passage may seem confusing since in the first part Heidegger states that Kant does not reduce the "I" to a substance, but the wording here is crucial. Heidegger says that Kant does not *ontically* reduce the "I" to a substance. The distinction between ontical and ontological is an important one for Heidegger. Macquarrie and Robinson note, "While the terms 'ontisch' ('ontical') and 'ontologisch' ('ontological') are not explicitly defined, their meanings will emerge rather clearly. Ontological inquiry is concerned primarily with *Being*; ontical inquiry is concerned primarily with *entities* and the facts about them" (ibid., 31 n. 3). Thus, what Heidegger is saying here is that Kant sees that the Ego cannot simply be a substantial entity among other entities; nevertheless, Kant does view the Ego as a subject, which confines it to the realm of substance, that is, the present-to-hand. In other words, the Transcendental Ego is not an entity, but it is a subject. And this places it in the realm of substance.

⁴³ Ibid., 496 n. xix.

say that *Dasein is the Being* of this ‘between’. Yet to take our orientation from this ‘between’ would still be misleading. For with such an orientation we would also be covertly assuming [[or “collude unawares with” (“macht unbesehen ... mit”)⁴⁴]] the entities between which this “between”, as such, ‘is’, and we would be doing so in a way which is ontologically vague. The “between” is already conceived as the result of the *convenientia* of two things that are present-at-hand. But to assume these beforehand [[or “But this, the preceding approach,” (“Der vorgängige Ansatz dieser aber”)⁴⁵]] always *splits* the phenomenon asunder, and there is no prospect of putting it together again from the fragments. Not only do we lack the ‘cement’; even the ‘schema’ in accordance with which this joining-together is to be accomplished, has been split asunder, or never as yet unveiled.⁴⁶

Being-in, an essential aspect of Dasein’s Being, entails relationality. In discussing Being-in, therefore, Heidegger is discussing the nature of relation, that is, of the “between”. The common Aristotelian way of understanding “between” is as something itself independent of the relata, that is, the present-at-hand entities it relates. In this case, it is understood as a “*commercium*” which is itself present-at-hand and relates two present-at-hand entities. The “between”, the relation, is conceived as a relation of two substantial, that is, present-at-hand, entities which are already present. But this approach to understanding relation “splits” (“sprengt”) the phenomena in such a way that it cannot be put back together.⁴⁷ To understand entities, including Dasein, as primordially present-to-hand, that is, as substance, is not only problematic but destructive. Substance ontology obscures the question of Being by destroying the very entities by which access to Being is possible. If one takes a phenomenological approach to the question of Being by which the phenomena is understood as “showing-itself-in-itself”, then it is clear that anything which tears the phenomena asunder in an irreparable way will render any investigation into the nature

⁴⁴ Stambaugh’s translation. (Heidegger, Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 124.)

⁴⁵ My alternate translation.

⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 170.

⁴⁷ Heidegger’s imagery is actually much more violent here. The German word “sprengen”, translated here “splits”, actually means “blow up”, “explode”, “demolish”. For a different reading of this passage, see Haugeland, John, “Dasein’s Disclosedness,” in *Heidegger: A Critical reader*, ed. Hubert Dreyfus and Harrison Hall (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 34ff. His interpretation, however, fails to explain the “splitting” of the phenomenon and why it cannot be put back together.

of Being itself, any truly ontological inquiry, impossible. The phenomena by which Being is revealed are destroyed. Summarizing the situation, Frede states:

In spite of his ‘Copernican turn’ toward subjectivity, Kant left the main feature of ancient ontology intact: the centrality of substance, the *thinghood* of the thing, remained uncontested. That is to say, for Kant the independent substance that persists through time remains the fundamental building block of all reality. The independent ‘thing’ that is dealt with and categorized in all our experience and determined by scientific thought remains in its very *being* separate from the subject. In particular, the attempt to prove the existence of the external world is treated by Heidegger as a clear indication that Kant had not questioned the basis of traditional ontology rigorously enough. The idealist, in turn, seems to be condemned to *immanentism*, the problem of explaining the ‘transcendence’ of objects in relation to our minds such that it makes sense even to talk about the natural world outside us. All these problems arise, Heidegger tells us, only if one posits a fundamental *rift* between the isolated subject or ‘mind’ and an independently existing realm of objects. Such a rift for Heidegger is not a necessary presupposition; it is rather the result of the philosopher’s mistaken ‘theoretical stance’ and leads to what Heidegger calls a ‘splitting asunder of the phenomena’ (BT 170). There is no way to get beyond the split between what occurs inside us and what occurs outside so long as ‘occurrence alongside’ is the only available ontological category.⁴⁸ (emphases in the original)

As long as ontology is viewed in terms of substance, any investigation into the nature of Being itself is hopeless.

Thus, Heidegger recognizes the problematic nature of substance ontology and moves beyond it. He does not reject presence-at-hand completely. This would be to deny that independent entities exist at all, reducing them either to a hopelessly indeterminate glob or to a by-product of solipsistic subjectivism. Rather, he recognizes that the substantiality of entities in the world, their presence-at-hand, cannot be ontologically primary. There must be a union of both the subjective and objective realms which maintains the distinctiveness of both.

⁴⁸ Frede, “The Question of Being: Heidegger’s Project,” 61.

RELATIONALITY IN "BEING AND TIME"

It is true that in *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that the question of Being must be asked from the perspective of Dasein: "Dasein has turned out to be, more than any other entity, the one which must first be interrogated ontologically."⁴⁹ Why is this the case? As Heidegger states,

Dasein is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it. But in that case, this is a constitutive state of Dasein's Being, and this implies that Dasein, in its Being, has a relationship towards that Being—a relationship which itself is one of Being. And this means further that there is some way in which Dasein understands itself in its Being, and that to some degree it does so explicitly. It is peculiar to this entity that with and through its Being, this Being is disclosed to it. *Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being*. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological.⁵⁰

In the inquiry into the nature of Being, therefore, Dasein is the entity under investigation because Dasein is the entity in which, both existentially and ontologically, Being is disclosed as such.⁵¹ However, Heidegger also notes, "One of our first tasks will be to prove that if we posit an 'I' or subject as that which is proximally given, we shall completely miss the phenomenal content [Bestand] of Dasein."⁵² Dasein is, therefore, not to be understood as a Subject; Dasein is neither a Cartesian *cogito* nor a

⁴⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 34.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 32.

⁵¹ In later Heidegger, "clearing" and "disclosedness (unconcealedness)" are explicitly used to designate the place where Being opens itself up. See, for example, *The Origin of the Work of Art*, "There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is, like the Nothing which we scarcely know. That which is can only be, as a being, if it stands within and stands out within what is lighted in this clearing. Only this clearing grants and guarantees to us humans a passage to those beings that we ourselves are not, and access to the being that we ourselves are. Thanks to this clearing, beings are unconcealed in certain changing degrees." (Heidegger, Martin, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 51–52.)

⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 72.

Kantian or Husserlian Transcendental Ego.⁵³ Thus, while Dasein is the entity through which the question of Being must be first asked, unlike the intersubjectivity of Husserl in which the “other” is grounded in the subjectivity of the Transcendental Ego, for Heidegger the world does not reduce to Dasein.

How then is Dasein to be understood? Dasein fundamentally is “Being-in-the-world”. Heidegger states that Dasein “in every case has Being-in-the-world as the way in which it is”.⁵⁴ This means that Dasein, in its ontological ground, finds itself in a world. This does not, like Husserl, reduce the world to an aspect of Dasein’s Being; the Being of the world is not “Being-in-Dasein”. Rather, Dasein and the world co-constitute each other. The world is a key ontological constituent of Dasein, while at the same time, Dasein is a key ontological constituent of the world. Dasein’s being fundamentally is “being-*in*-the-world”, and so the world is not reduced to Dasein nor is Dasein reduced to the world. Dasein and world only exist in their inter-relationality. Thus Being, for both Dasein and the world, is relational.⁵⁵ As Heidegger states in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*,

World exists—that is, it is—only if Dasein exists, only if there is Dasein. Only if world is there, if Dasein exists as being-in-the-world, is there understanding of being, and only if this understanding exists are intraworldly beings unveiled as extant [Vorhandenes—present-at-hand] and handy [Zuhandenes—ready-to-hand]. World-understanding as Dasein-understanding is self-understanding. Self and world belong together in the

⁵³It can be tempting, and many interpreters give in to this temptation, to understand Dasein just this way, that is, in Husserlian terms as a Subject in which the world is found, but this is not the case. As Dreyfus notes, “But we are not to think of Dasein as a conscious subject. Many interpreters make just this mistake. They see Heidegger as an ‘existential phenomenologist,’ which means to them an edifying elaboration of Husserl.” (Dreyfus, Hubert L., *Being-in-the-World A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time Division I* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 13.)

⁵⁴Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 79. See also p. 80 where Heidegger states that Being-in-the-world is the essential state of Dasein, and p. 84, where he notes that Being-in-the-world belongs essentially to Dasein.

⁵⁵Haugeland comes close to recognizing the ontological relationality inherent here but ends up rejecting it: “On the face of it, this structure [Being-in-the-world] looks like a relation: being-amidst as a relation between self (agent, who) and world. The difficulty with such a view, however, emerges as soon as we ask about the relata.” (Haugeland, “Dasein’s Disclosedness,” 34.) He fails in recognizing the ontological relationality here because he yet remains bound by an Aristotelian conception of “relation”.

single entity, the Dasein. Self and world are not two beings, like subject and object, or like I and thou, but self and world are the basic determination of the Dasein itself in the unity of the structure of being-in-the-world.⁵⁶

The world is not part of a “self” which is Dasein; rather, both “self” and “world” together constitute Dasein. Dasein is a unity, a unity which is the unity of being-in-the-world, and this unity is constituted by *both* self and world. Dasein, therefore, cannot be understood as a Kantian or Husserlian Transcendental Ego. This co-constitutionality is also expressed in *Being and Time*: “Only as long as Dasein *is* ... ‘is there’ [[gibt es]] Being. When Dasein does not exist, ‘independence’ ‘is’ not either, nor ‘is’ the ‘in-itself’ ... In such a case even entities within-the-world can neither be discovered nor lie hidden. In such a case it cannot be said that entities are, *nor can it be said that they are not*”⁵⁷ (emphasis added). Lest we remain yet tempted to understand Dasein as similar to the Transcendental Ego of Husserl and Kant, this passage precludes us. Heidegger is clear that it is not the case that if Dasein does not exist, entities in the world do not exist. True, it cannot be said that the world and the entities in it exist if Dasein does not exist, but, significantly, neither can it be said that they do not exist. Furthermore, Heidegger also states in *Being and Time*,

The entity which is essentially constituted by Being-in-the-world *is* itself in every case its ‘there’. According to the familiar signification of the word, the ‘there’ points to a ‘here’ and a ‘yonder’. The ‘here’ of an ‘I-here’ is always understood in relation to a ‘yonder’ ready-to-hand, in the sense of a Being towards this ‘yonder’—a Being which is de-severant, directional, and concerned. Dasein’s existential spatiality, which thus determines its ‘location’, is itself grounded in Being-in-the-world. The “yonder” belongs definitely to something encountered within-the-world. ‘Here’ and ‘yonder’ are possible only in a ‘there’—that is to say, only if there is an entity which has made a disclosure of spatiality as the Being of the ‘there’. This entity carries in its ownmost Being the character of not being closed off. In the expression ‘there’ we have in view this essential disclosedness. By reason of this disclosedness, this entity (Dasein), together with the Being-there of the world, is ‘there’ for itself.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Heidegger, Martin, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), 297.

⁵⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 255.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 171.

And later he adds, “To say that in existing, Dasein is its ‘there’, is equivalent to saying that the world is ‘there’; its *Being-there* is Being-in.”⁵⁹ Just as the world requires Dasein to be, so also Dasein requires the world to be. For Heidegger Dasein and world are essential ontological aspects of each other. Dasein is its “there”, but it cannot be its “there” unless the world is there. The world does not exist without Dasein within it, but neither does Dasein exist without a world in which it finds itself. The world can only be “there” if there is something for which it is “here”. This is not mere semantic gameplay. This expresses the fundamental ontological relationality which makes up both Dasein and the world. Thus, by saying that if Dasein does not exist it cannot be said that things in the world do not exist, Heidegger is not simply saying that if Dasein does not exist, there is no way of knowing or saying (since there is no one who could know or say) that the world exists. For Dasein to be, the world must be. This is what “Dasein is its ‘there’” means. But the reverse is also true. For the world to be, Dasein must be. The world is as much an ontologically constitutive element of Dasein as Dasein is of the world. Both ontologically co-constitute each other.⁶⁰ As Dreyfus notes, “‘Subject’ and ‘object,’ Dasein and world, are ultimately so intimately intertwined that one cannot separate the world from Daseining.”⁶¹ Neither world nor Dasein can be ontologically separated from the other.

By asserting the co-constitutionality of both the world and Dasein, Heidegger is expressing thereby a fundamental ontological relationality which grounds Being itself, since Being itself is only found in this relation of co-constitutionality—a relation in which neither Dasein nor the world *is* apart from the other. This co-constitutionality, however, is only possible

⁵⁹ Ibid., 182.

⁶⁰ It is also worth noting that Being does not reduce to Dasein. In the *Letter on “Humanism”*, Heidegger states, “In *Being and Time* (p. 212 [GA 2, 281]) we purposely and cautiously say ...: ‘there is/it gives’ [‘es gibt’] being ... For the ‘it’ that here ‘gives’ is being itself. The ‘gives’ names the essence of being that is giving, granting its truth.” (Heidegger, Martin, *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 254–255.) Thus, in the Being which is a constitutive element of Dasein, it is Being which gives to Dasein, not the other way around. But this is not his only point. He goes on to note that “‘it gives’ is used preliminarily to avoid the locution ‘being is’; for ‘is’ is commonly said of some thing that is. We call such a thing a being. But being ‘is’ precisely not ‘a being’” (ibid., 255). It is clear then that when Heidegger talks about Being, he is not talking about the kind of being entities have, not even an entity such as Dasein. Being is different from beings, as has been discussed above. And as will become clear, Being is primordially relational.

⁶¹ Dreyfus, *Being-in-the-World A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time Division I*, 98.

on an understanding in which relationality, not substance, is ontologically primordial. Only in this way can Dasein and the world each find their being in the other without one being reduced to the other.

How is this foundational ontological relationality of Dasein and the world manifested in *Being and Time*? It is manifested in the very constitution of Being-in-the-world itself. As noted above, Heidegger states that Dasein essentially is “Being-in-the-world”. Heidegger hints at the underlying ontological relationality in this essential aspect of Dasein when he states, “The compound expression ‘Being-in-the-world’ indicates in the very way we have coined it, that it stands for a *unitary* phenomenon. This primary datum must be seen as a whole. But while Being-in-the-world cannot be broken up into contents which may be pieced together, this does not prevent it from having several constitutive items in its structure.”⁶² Thus, while the phenomenon has various “items in its structure”, it is, nevertheless, an essential unity which, in itself, cannot be broken apart. In order to understand this phenomenon more fully, however, it is necessary to understand the two aspects which constitute its structure: (1) “Being-in” and (2) “world”.

The “Being-in” which is ontologically constitutive of “Being-in-the-world” is not a “being-in” as of some “thing” that is spatially located in some other “thing”. This sort of “insideness” is a substance-based understanding of “inside” which is not applicable to the “Being-in” which is constitutive of “Being-in-the-world”. Heidegger states this explicitly:

What is meant by “*Being-in*”? Our proximal reaction is to round out this expression to “Being-in ‘in the world’”, and we are inclined to understand this Being-in as ‘Being in something’ [“*Sein in ...*”]. This latter term designates the kind of Being which an entity has when it is ‘in’ another one, as the water is ‘in’ the glass, or the garment is ‘in’ the cupboard. By this ‘in’ we mean the relationship of Being which two entities extended ‘in’ space have to each other with regard to their location in that space. Both water and glass, garment and cupboard, are ‘in’ space and ‘at’ a location, and both in the same way. This relationship of Being can be expanded: for instance, the bench is in the lecture-room, the lecture-room is in the university, the university is in the city, and so on, until we can say that the bench is ‘in world-space’. All entities whose Being ‘in’ one another can thus be described have the same kind of Being—that of Being-present-at-hand—as Things occurring ‘within’ the world. Being-present-at-hand ‘in’ something which is

⁶² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 78.

likewise present-at-hand, and Being-present-at-hand-along-with [Mitvorhandensein] in the sense of a definite location-relationship with something else which has the same kind of Being, are ontological characteristics which we call “*categorical*”: they are of such a sort as to belong to entities whose kind of Being is not of the character of Dasein. Being-in, on the other hand, is a state of Dasein’s Being; it is an *existentiale*. So one cannot think of it as the Being-present-at-hand of some corporeal Thing (such as a human body) ‘in’ an entity which is present-at-hand.⁶³

The kind of “Being-in” which belongs to Dasein’s being, “Being-in-the-world” is what Heidegger calls “being absorbed in the world”.

‘In’ is derived from “*innan*”—“to reside”, “*habitare*” [[latin-“to dwell”]], “to dwell” [sich auf halten]. ‘*An*’ signifies “I am accustomed”, “I am familiar with”, “I look after something”. It has the signification of “*colo*” [[latin-“inhabit, live in”]] in the senses of “*habito*” [[latin-“inhabit”, “dwell”]] and “*diligo*” [[latin-“to value”, “hold dear”]]. The entity to which Being-in in this signification belongs is one which we have characterized as that entity which in each case I myself am [bin]. The expression ‘*bin*’ is connected with ‘*bei*’, and so ‘*ich bin*’ [‘I am’] means in its turn “I reside” or “dwell alongside” the world, as that which is familiar to me in such and such a way. “Being” [Sein], as the infinitive of ‘*ich bin*’ (that is to say, when it is understood as an *existentiale*), signifies “to reside alongside ...”, “to be familiar with ...”. “*Being-in*” is thus the formal existential expression for the Being of Dasein, which has Being-in-the-world as its essential state. ‘Being alongside’ the world in the sense of being absorbed in the world ...⁶⁴

From this it is clear that “Being-in”, as something ontologically primordial in the being of Dasein, is relational, but not relational in the sense of two things related as side-by-side; rather, it is a relationality in which something is absorbed in and by that “in” which it is. It is a relationality in which that which is “in” and that “in” which it is are ontologically

⁶³ Ibid., 79.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 80.

co-constitutional.⁶⁵ This becomes clearer in Heidegger's discussion of "world".

When examining the "worldhood of the world", Heidegger explicitly recognizes this primordial ontological relationality:

The relational character which these relationships of assigning [[i.e., "for-the-sake-of-which", "in-order-to", "towards-this", and "in-which"]] possess, we take as one of *signifying*. In its familiarity with these relationships, Dasein 'signifies' to itself: in a primordial manner it gives itself both its Being and its potentiality-for-Being as something which it is to understand with regard to its Being-in-the-world. The "for-the-sake-of-which" signifies an "in-order-to"; this in turn, a "towards-this"; the latter, an "in-which" of letting something be involved; and that in turn, the "with-which" of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality; they are what they are as this signifying [Be-deuten] in which Dasein gives itself beforehand its Being-in-the-world as something to be understood. The relational totality of this signifying we call "*significance*". This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is.⁶⁶

Heidegger later adds, "The context of assignments or references, which, as significance, is constitutive for worldhood, can be taken formally in the

⁶⁵ Gelven comes close to this understanding. Commenting on this section, he states, "Suppose I go to the theater with a friend and due to the popularity of the play we are assigned separated seats. I am therefore *next* to a stranger but still *with* my friend. The difference between 'being next to' and 'being with' cannot, then, be determined by spatial considerations alone. Nor is it determined by pure psychological attitudes or how I feel about my companion, for I can be *with* someone I dislike or even one to whom I am indifferent. I can even be *next* to my friend but *with* my enemy. Since these determinations are neither spatial nor psychological, they *precede* such empirical or physical considerations and are hence a priori. But such distinctions as being with (Mitsein) and being next to (or being alongside) are indeed meaningful and, when combined with other modes, constitute the a priori structure of Being-in-the-world." (Gelven, Michael, *A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1989), 59.—emphasis in the original) Nevertheless, he fails to recognize the underlying primordial ontological relationality and co-constitutionality of world and Dasein, reducing "world" to an aspect of Dasein's consciousness: "'World' here does not necessarily mean the sophisticated view of the scientist, who imagines the earth as a sphere or ball hurtling through the vast cons of limitless space. 'World,' in the sense of this existential, would be found in the self-reflective consciousness even of a rather primitive awareness, for which the limits of the world may well be the limits of a village or county" (ibid., 57.—emphasis added).

⁶⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 120.

sense of a system of Relations.”⁶⁷ This system of Relations, however, is not understood in an Aristotelian sense in which the relation is grounded upon substantial relata. In this system of Relations, “these ‘Relations’ and ‘Relata’” are “the ‘in-order-to’, the ‘for-the-sake-of’, and the ‘with-which’ of an involvement”.⁶⁸ Further, this “involvement” is identified with entities which are “ready-to-hand”, when Heidegger states that Dasein, because it is familiar with significance, makes possible the discovery of “*entities which are encountered in a world with involvement (readiness-to-hand) as their kind of Being*”.⁶⁹ From this it can be seen that the relations, that is, the “in-order-to”, the “for-the-sake-of”, and the “with-which”, relates relata that have “involvement” as their Being, that is, the “ready-to-hand”. But the “ready-to-hand”, as that which has involvement as its “kind of Being”, is already relational, since involvement entails relationality. Thus, the world is a unity of referential relationships, and things in the world are constituted by these referential relations, and this referential relationality constitutes their readiness-to-hand. World, Dasein, and ready-to-hand entities are, therefore, all bound together in an intricate ontological web of relationality.

It is, in fact, only on the basis of this relationality that substantial entities present-at-hand can be discovered at all. Heidegger notes, “This ‘system of Relations’, as something constitutive for worldhood is so far from volatilizing the Being of the ready-to-hand within-the-world, that the worldhood of the world provides the basis on which such entities can for the first time be discovered as they are ‘substantially’ ‘in themselves’. And only if entities within-the-world can be encountered at all, is it possible, in the field of such entities, to make accessible what is just present-at-hand and no more.”⁷⁰ This passage presents something of a difficulty, since Heidegger is saying that the ready-to-hand, which as has been seen is ontologically relational and not substantial, can be discovered “substantially”. However, the quotes which Heidegger places around “substantially” and “in themselves” are important. He thereby indicates that it is only in a qualified sense that they are discovered as they are “substantially” and “in themselves”. As ready-to-hand and relational, they are fundamentally not “in themselves”. The ready-to-hand is what it is in relation to

⁶⁷ Ibid., 160.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 121–122.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 122.

something (i.e., “etwas um-zu ...”). To clarify what Heidegger is saying then, the worldhood of the world makes possible the discovery of entities which are ready-to-hand as entities. These entities do not get dissolved by the relationality of the world; rather, they come into their own being in the referential relationality of the world. They are only possible, as ready-to-hand, because the world (and with it Dasein) is primordialily ontologically relational. In addition, he states that only in the field of entities which are ready-to-hand is that which is merely present-at-hand, that is, substantial, possible. That the ready-to-hand makes possible the discovery of the present-at-hand has important ontological significance. It is only on the basis of the ready-to-hand that the present-at-hand can be present-at-hand at all.

The relationality of the ready-to-hand is most apparent in our engagement with equipment. Heidegger states,

The Greeks had an appropriate term for ‘Things’: *πράγματα*—that is to say, that which one has to do with in one’s concerned dealings (*πράξις*). But ontologically, the specifically ‘pragmatic’ character of the *πράγματα* is just what the Greeks left in obscurity; they thought of these ‘proximally’ as ‘mere Things’. We shall call those entities which we encounter in concern “*equipment*”. In our dealings we come across equipment for writing, sewing, working, transportation, measurement. The kind of Being which equipment possesses must be exhibited. The clue for doing this lies in our first defining what makes an item of equipment—namely, its equipmentality.... Equipment is essentially ‘something in-order-to ...’ [“etwas um-zu ...”]. A totality of equipment is constituted by various ways of the ‘in-order-to’, such as serviceability, conduciveness, usability, manipulability. In the ‘in-order-to’ as a structure there lies an *assignment* or *reference* of something to something.... The kind of Being which equipment possesses—in which it manifests itself in its own right—we call “*readiness-to-hand*” [*Zuhandenheit*].⁷¹

Within the referential relationality of the world, ready-to-hand can make its appearance as equipment. Equipment then reveals its relationality, that is, its readiness-to-hand, in the essential “in-order-to” of its nature. This “in-order-to”, however, reflects not only the essential relationality of equipment, that is, the “*assignment* or *reference* of something to something” of its structure, but also reflects the inherent potentiality in equipment. Equipment, as ready-to-hand, is characterized by possibility.

⁷¹ Ibid., 96–97, 98.

Heidegger notes, "That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its serviceability, its usability, and its detrimentality. The totality of involvements is revealed as the categorial whole of a *possible* interconnection of the ready-to-hand."⁷² Thus, the relationality which is ontologically foundational for the ready-to-hand manifests as possibility. It is because the ready-to-hand is relational that a totality of possible interconnections arises.

Because the possibility which arises from ready-to-hand manifests the "in-order-to" of equipment in various ways, it is not limited to any specific manifestation of possibility. This means that one of the possibilities which equipment/the ready-to-hand can manifest is as *not* ready-to-hand. Heidegger states,

In our dealings with the world of our concern, the un-ready-to-hand can be encountered not only in the sense of that which is unusable or simply missing, but as something un-ready-to-hand which is *not* missing at all and *not* unusable, but which 'stands in the way' of our concern. That to which our concern refuses to turn, that for which it has 'no time', is something *un*-ready-to-hand in the manner of what does not belong here, of what has not as yet been attended to. Anything which is unready-to-hand in this way is disturbing to us, and enables us to see the *obstinacy* of that with which we must concern ourselves in the first instance before we do anything else. With this obstinacy, the presence-at-hand of the ready-to-hand makes itself known in a new way as the Being of that which still lies before us and calls for our attending to it. The modes of conspicuousness, obtrusiveness, and obstinacy all have the function of bringing to the fore the characteristic of presence-at-hand in what is ready-to-hand. But the ready-to-hand is not thereby just *observed* and stared at as something present-at-hand; the presence-at-hand which makes itself known is still bound up in the readiness-to-hand of equipment. Such equipment still does not veil itself in the guise of mere Things. It becomes 'equipment' in the sense of something which one would like to shove out of the way. But in such a Tendency to shove things aside, the ready-to-hand shows itself as still ready-to-hand in its unswerving presence-at-hand.⁷³

It is, therefore, only on the basis of the ontologically prior and relational ready-to-hand that the substantial present-at-hand can appear at all. The present-at-hand ontologically depends on the ready-to-hand.

⁷² Ibid., 184.

⁷³ Ibid., 103–104.

We have seen then that equipment is, by its very nature, relational, and this relationality is reflected in its readiness-to-hand. As should be expected, however, the fact that possibility is a manifestation of equipment's essential relationality entails that this possibility is itself relational. In other words, the fact that this possibility is a manifestation of relationality entails that this possibility cannot be confined to the particular piece of equipment which is ready-to-hand; rather, it must connect to that *for which* it is equipment. Thus, this essential possibility within the equipmentality of the ready-to-hand is, for Heidegger, the flip side of Dasein's own possibility, a possibility which is revealed in Being-in, an essential aspect of the structure of Dasein's Being-in-the-world. How is this so?

Being-in itself manifests as possibility, and this possibility, a possibility which is inherent to Dasein, reveals the potentiality in both the world and the ready-to-hand. Heidegger states, "As a potentiality-for-Being, any Being-in is a potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world. Not only is the world, *qua* world, disclosed as possible significance, but when that which is within-the-world is itself freed, this entity is freed for *its own* possibilities. That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its serviceability, its usability, and its detrimentality. The totality of involvements is revealed as the categorial whole of a *possible* interconnection of the ready-to-hand."⁷⁴ In the possibility inherent in Dasein's Being-in-the-world, the world manifests as possible significance, and along with this, the ready-to-hand is also discovered in its own possibilities, which possibilities are possible involvements *of* the ready-to-hand *for* Dasein. Heidegger states,

That in which it [[the ready-to-hand]] is involved is the "towards-which" of serviceability, and the "for-which" of usability. With the "towards-which" of serviceability there can again be an involvement: *with* this thing, for instance, which is ready-to-hand, and which we accordingly call a "hammer", there is an involvement in hammering; with hammering, there is an involvement in making something fast; with making something fast, there is an involvement in protection against bad weather; and this protection 'is' for the sake of [um-willen] providing shelter for Dasein—that is to say, for the sake of a possibility of Dasein's Being.⁷⁵

And as was already seen in a passage cited above,

⁷⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 116.

The “for-the-sake-of-which” signifies an “in-order-to”; this in turn, a “towards-this”; the latter, an “in-which” of letting something be involved; and that in turn, the “with-which” of an involvement. These relationships are bound up with one another as a primordial totality; they are what they are as this signifying [Be-deuten] in which Dasein gives itself beforehand its Being-in-the-world as something to be understood. The relational totality of this signifying we call “*significance*”. This is what makes up the structure of the world—the structure of that wherein Dasein as such already is.

This shows that the relations “for-the-sake-of-which”, “in-order-to”, “towards-which”, and “in-which” all reflect the possibilities inherent in the world, the ready-to-hand, and Dasein. Thus, from what has been said, it can be seen that these possibilities which belong to Dasein, the world, and the ready-to-hand mutually reflect an interrelationality which is ontically unified in the possibilities of involvement and ontologically grounded upon the relationality at the heart of the Being of each.⁷⁶

This ontological relationality is also reflected in Dasein’s Being-toward-death. Dasein as Being-in-the-world, which has Being-in as a constitutive element, entails that Dasein always is a potentiality for Being. But the utmost possibility, the possibility that is the end of all possibilities for Dasein is death. Heidegger states,

In Dasein there is always something *still outstanding*, which, as a potentiality-for-Being for Dasein itself, has not yet become ‘actual’. It is essential to the basic constitution of Dasein that there is *constantly something still to be settled* [eine *ständige Unabgeschlossenheit*]. Such a lack of totality signifies that there is something still outstanding in one’s potentiality-for-Being. But as soon as Dasein ‘exists’ in such a way that absolutely nothing more is still outstanding in it, then it has already for this very reason become “no-longer-Being-there” [Nicht-mehr-da-sein]. Its Being is annihilated when what is still outstanding in its Being has been liquidated. As long as Dasein *is* as an entity, it has never reached its ‘wholeness’. But if it gains such ‘wholeness’, this gain

⁷⁶It is an ontical unification by virtue of the fact that the possibilities of involvement belong to each of the entities, that is, Dasein and equipment, as entities, while at the same time uniting them in the specific involvement. Dasein’s involvement with a hammer, for example, unites both Dasein and the hammer in the activity, the involvement, of hammering. But this occurs on the ontical level of the entities as entities. On the ontological level, they are united by the relationality which grounds both Dasein as Dasein and the hammer as ready-to-hand.

becomes the utter loss of Being-in-the-world. In such a case, it can never again be experienced *as an entity*.⁷⁷

Dasein can never achieve the full actuality of its Being, since, as has been seen, potentiality is an essential aspect of its Being. If Dasein were ever to attain its complete actuality, therefore, it would cease to be. It would no longer be “there”, because the very nature of the “there” of Dasein is the potentiality of involvement with a world. Thus, for Dasein to attain “wholeness” or “completeness”, Dasein must die. And thus, death is Dasein’s ownmost possibility:

With death, Dasein stands before itself in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. This is a possibility in which the issue is nothing less than Dasein’s Being-in-the-world. Its death is the possibility of no-longer being-able-to-be-there. If Dasein stands before itself as this possibility, it has been *fully* assigned to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being. When it stands before itself in this way, all its relations to any other Dasein have been undone. This ownmost non-relational possibility is at the same time the uttermost one. As potentiality-for-Being, Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.⁷⁸

From this, it can be seen that death is the end of Dasein’s relationality, and it is this relationality, manifested by Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, which makes death a possibility. Death is only possible as a not-being-there because there *is* a “there” to begin with. Death is an issue for Dasein precisely because there is a world in which Dasein is. Death is the uttermost possibility precisely in that it is the possibility of im-possibility, that is, non-possibility. And it is only on the basis of Dasein’s essential relationality that the non-relationality of death can be for Dasein. Because, as was seen above, death is the “completion” of Dasein, because it is in death that Dasein attains its “wholeness”, death is already an aspect of Dasein’s being as Being-in-the-world. In the definition of death, Heidegger states, “The full existential-ontological conception of death may now be defined as follows: *death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein’s ownmost possibility—non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped*. *Death is, as Dasein’s end, in the Being of this entity towards its end*”⁷⁹ (underlined

⁷⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 279–280.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 294.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 303.

emphasis added). Death is *in* Dasein's Being as the end toward which Dasein is ultimately oriented. Death is an essential aspect of Dasein's relational Being insofar as it is the possibility of Dasein's non-relationality, that is, Dasein's non-being. Because "death is the possibility of no-longer being-able-to-be-there", it is only a possibility because Dasein is already actually "there".

Since Dasein is essentially possibility, and since Dasein's completeness, that is, its full actuality, is death, does this mean that Being itself is always potential and never actual? In other words, since death is non-relationality and at the same time the full actuality of Dasein, does this entail that Dasein can never fully *be*, since to be and to be actual seem synonymous? Does this in turn entail that Being as full actuality is non-relational and so contradict our main thesis? Not at all. To become fully actual in death simply means that Dasein becomes individual. Dasein becomes Dasein *qua* Dasein. It becomes particularized and individualized, a Dasein *in itself*. And as is to be expected in an ontology in which Being is characterized relationally, the more one becomes individualized, the less one *is*. This is true for Heidegger as well. He states, "The non-relational character of death, as understood in anticipation, individualizes Dasein down to itself. This individualizing is a way in which the 'there' is disclosed for existence. It makes manifest that all Being-alongside the things with which we concern ourselves, and all Being-with Others, will fail us when our ownmost potentiality-for-Being [[i.e., death]] is the issue."⁸⁰ In death, Dasein becomes separate from the world, it becomes "individual".⁸¹ Dasein's "there" is disclosed to it in death as that which will "fail" in the end, that is, in "our ownmost potentiality-for-Being". As individual, Dasein is separated from others and the world, Dasein ceases to be in relation and so becomes non-relational. Dasein dies.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid., 308.

⁸¹ There is an affinity here with Neoplatonism. In Neoplatonism, the further something is from the One, the more particular something is, the less it participates in Being, the less reality it has. For Heidegger, death individualizes; it makes particular. Thus, the more individualized we become, the more dead we are. For Heidegger, death is individualization, and for Neoplatonism, particularity is the loss of being.

⁸² One might argue that it is only because the world is not confined to the subjectivity of Dasein that death is possible. If the world were reduced to the subjectivity of Dasein, it could never be lost, or at least, death would necessarily be something other than the loss of being-in-the-world. It is only because humanity is not understood in terms of substance that death is a possibility. If humans are understood in terms of substance, that is, as existing independently and separately, then they are already dead.

Temporality is also an important concept which has significant ontological ramifications for Heidegger. According to Heidegger, Temporality is “the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call ‘Dasein’”.⁸³ If, therefore, Dasein as Being-in-the-world is ontologically relational, Time, as that which Being-in-the-world means, must be relational as well. But Time must also be relational on other grounds. If Heidegger does have a fundamentally relational understanding of Being, then Temporality itself must exist as ontologically related to Dasein and the world. Thus, it is not enough to say that Time is relational in that it consists of the past, present, and future, which can only be understood in relation to each other, that is, as a past *prior to* a present, or a future *not yet* present, etc. This would be a superficial relationality which still understands Time as something substantial existing in itself in three distinct modes. Thus, Heidegger states, “The conceptions of ‘future’, ‘past’ and ‘Present’ have first arisen in terms of the inauthentic way of understanding time,”⁸⁴ and “Temporality ‘is’ not an *entity* at all.”⁸⁵ Two things are thereby necessary: (1) Time, understood authentically, must express a relational unity of the three “moments” of Time, and (2) since Time is “the meaning of the Being of” Dasein, Temporality must be ontologically related to Dasein and the world.

The relational unity of Time is manifested in what Heidegger calls the “*ecstases*” of Time. He states, “*Temporality is the primordial ‘outside-of-itself’ in and for itself.* We therefore call the phenomena of the future, the character of having been, and the Present, the ‘*ecstases*’ of Temporality. Temporality is not, prior to this, an entity which first emerges from *itself*; its essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of the *ecstases*.”⁸⁶ The three *ecstases* by which Time manifests itself are a unity, and Time always manifests in a unity of the three *ecstases*. Heidegger notes, “Temporalizing does not signify that *ecstases* come in a ‘succession’. The future is *not later* than having been, and having been is *not earlier* than the Present. Temporality temporalizes itself as a future which makes present in the process of having been.”⁸⁷ Time, therefore, always manifests itself in the three *ecstases* unified together: the *future* manifests as a *having been* which gives rise to the *present*. It is out of this temporalizing that the inauthentic

⁸³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 38.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 374.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 401.

temporalizing which is experienced as a sequence of “nows” (a sequence which gives rise to the common notions of past, present, and future) arises:

What is characteristic of the ‘time’ which is accessible to the ordinary understanding, consists, among other things, precisely in the fact that it is a pure sequence of “nows”, without beginning and without end, in which the ecstatical character of primordial temporality has been levelled off. But this very levelling off, in accordance with its existential meaning, is grounded in the possibility of a definite kind of temporalizing, in conformity with which temporality temporalizes as inauthentic the kind of ‘time’ we have just mentioned.⁸⁸

For Heidegger, therefore, primordial Time is a relational unity in which the three *ecstases*, while different, remain united. Thus, Time in its temporalizing, that is, in its functioning *as* Time, manifests in a differentiated relational unity of its *ecstases*.⁸⁹ It is interesting to note that while the three *ecstases* are a relational unity in which they all exist equiprimordially; nevertheless, one of the *ecstases* is given a priority. Heidegger states,

In enumerating the ecstases, we have always mentioned the future first. We have done this to indicate that the future has a priority in the ecstatical unity of primordial and authentic temporality. This is so, even though temporality does not first arise through a cumulative sequence of the ecstases, but in each case temporalizes itself in their equiprimordially. But within this equiprimordially, the modes of temporalizing are different. The difference lies in the fact that the nature of the temporalizing can be determined primarily in terms of the different ecstases. Primordial and authentic temporality temporalizes itself in terms of the authentic future and in such a way that in having been futurally, it first of all awakens the Present. *The primary phenomenon of primordial and authentic temporality is the future.* The priority of the future will vary according to the ways in which the temporalizing of inau-

⁸⁸ Ibid., 377.

⁸⁹ It is worth noting here that Heidegger distinguishes between the “past”, which manifests in inauthentic Time, and “having been”, which manifests in authentic Time. The difference is that “past” is related to the “present-at-hand”, and as such it is reserved for entities which are no longer “present-at-hand”. Heidegger states, “‘As long as’ Dasein factically exists, it is never past [vergangen], but it always is indeed as already having *been*, in the sense of the ‘I am-as-having-been’. And only as long as Dasein is, *can* it *be* as having been. On the other hand, we call an entity ‘past’, when it is no longer present-at-hand” (ibid., 376).

thentic temporality itself is modified, but it will still come to the fore even in the derivative kind of ‘time’.⁹⁰

The reason for this priority lies in the essential possibility which lies at the heart of Dasein’s Being, and this leads to an examination of the second of the two necessary points mentioned above: Time’s ontological relation to Dasein and the world.

Heidegger states, “The ecstatical unity of temporality—that is, the unity of the ‘outside-of-itself’ in the raptures of the future, of what has been, and of the Present—is the condition for the possibility that there can be an entity [[Dasein]] which exists as its ‘there’.”⁹¹ Thus, Time must be ontologically related to Dasein and the world, that is, the “there”, as their ontological ground. But in what way is Dasein so grounded by Time? It is in Care and Time as the ontological ground for Care. As Heidegger notes, “*Temporality reveals itself as the meaning of authentic care.*”⁹² It is necessary now to turn to an examination of Care and its relation to Time.

Regarding Care, Heidegger states,

That very potentiality-for-Being for the sake of which Dasein is, has Being-in-the-world as its kind of Being. Thus it implies ontologically a relation to entities within-the-world. Care is always concern and solicitude, even if only privatively. In willing, an entity which is understood—that is, one which has been projected upon its possibility—gets seized upon, either as something with which one may concern oneself, or as something which is to be brought into its Being through solicitude. *Hence*, to any willing there belongs something willed, which has already made itself definite in terms of a “for-the-sake-of-which”. If willing is to be possible ontologically, the following items are constitutive for it: (1) the prior disclosedness of the “for-the-sake-of-which” in general (Being-ahead-of-itself); (2) the disclosedness of something with which one can concern oneself (the world as the “wherein” of Being-already); (3) Dasein’s projection of itself understandingly upon a potentiality-for-Being towards a possibility of the entity ‘willed’. In the phenomenon of willing, the underlying totality of care shows through.⁹³

This means that Care is grounded in the very possibility which characterizes Dasein itself. This possibility of Dasein can be directed toward things

⁹⁰ Ibid., 378.

⁹¹ Ibid., 401.

⁹² Ibid., 374.

⁹³ Ibid., 238–239.

ready-to-hand, in which case the possibility is understood as “concern”, or toward other Dasein, in which case it is “solicitude”.⁹⁴ Heidegger states,

If Dasein-with remains existentially constitutive for Being-in-the-world, then, like our circumspective dealings with the ready-to-hand within-the-world (which, by way of anticipation, we have called ‘concern’), it must be Interpreted in terms of the phenomenon of *care*; for as “care” the Being of Dasein in general is to be defined.... Concern is a character-of-Being which Being-with cannot have as its own even though Being-with, like concern, is a *Being towards* entities encountered within-the-world. But those entities towards which Dasein as Being-with comports itself do not have the kind of Being which belongs to equipment ready-to-hand; they are themselves Dasein. These entities are not objects of concern, but rather of *solicitude*.⁹⁵

From these passages, we can see that Care is grounded upon the possibility inherent in Dasein’s Being-in-the-world, but these possibilities involve a “Being-ahead-of-itself”, in the case of “for-the-sake-of-which”, and “Being-already” in relation to a world in which one is. These possibilities, however, are only possible on the basis of Time. Heidegger notes, “Dasein’s totality of Being as care means: ahead-of-itself-already-being-in (a world) as Being-alongside (entities encountered within-the-world) ... *The primordial unity of the structure of care lies in temporality*. The ‘ahead-of-itself’ is grounded in the future. In the ‘Being-already-in ...’ the character of ‘having been’ is made known. ‘Being-alongside ...’ becomes possible in making present.”⁹⁶ Because Dasein is in the world, it is ontologically related to entities within-the-world, and this relation manifests as Care, “even if only privatively”, that is, as a lack of care, concern, solicitude. Dasein is, therefore, ontologically grounded upon Care by the very nature of Being-in-the-world itself. But Care, along with possibilities for involvement, entails in its very nature an “ahead-of-itself”, an “already-in”, and an “alongside” which, in their turn, entail Time. Thus, it can be

⁹⁴ Examples of these would be one’s concern toward a hammer, when one wills to use the hammer in a way directed toward the possibility of hammering, or one’s solicitude toward a person in need (e.g., hungry), when one wills to help the person in a way directed to the possibility of satisfying their need (e.g., hunger).

⁹⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 157.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 375.

seen that Time, as the ontological ground for Care, is also the ontological ground for Dasein.⁹⁷

How are we to understand, however, the future's priority within the unity of Time's *ecstases*? Possibility, which is essentially constitutive of Dasein's Being, is always directed toward some end not yet actualized, and this "not yet" points to and is grounded upon the future. The future, therefore, always takes a certain precedence due to the essential potentiality inherent within Dasein. Or to use Heideggerian terms, possibility, which is essential to the Being of Dasein and the world, always entails a "for-the-sake-of-which", which is in itself directed toward an "ahead-of-itself", and so the "ahead-of-itself", which is grounded in futurity, always takes precedence. But the "ahead-of-itself" always also includes the "already-in" and "alongside", each of which is its own *ecstasis*. Thus, as Käufer summarizes the situation, "each ecstasy requires the others, and all three are constitutive of the basic unity, the existential notion of the self. However, as the self temporalizes itself, that is, as temporality brings forth concrete existing Dasein, it does so primarily in terms of the future. This means that in each concrete case, the self shows up first and foremost in the purposive comportment toward possibilities, and the past and present show up in terms of this purposiveness."⁹⁸ This should not, however, be understood to suggest that Time is subjective. Dasein does not give rise to or ground Time; rather, the opposite is the case: Time is the ontological grounds which "brings forth" Dasein. Heidegger states, "Temporality 'is' not an *entity* at all. It is not, but it *temporalizes* itself ... Temporality temporalizes, and indeed it temporalizes possible ways of itself: These make possible the multiplicity of Dasein's modes of Being."⁹⁹ Thus, as Seyppel points out, "It [temporality] is, we have seen, neither objective or

⁹⁷ It deserves to be noted that Dasein's Being-toward-death is only possible on the basis of Time as well. As Heidegger states, "If either authentic or inauthentic *Being-towards-death* belongs to Dasein's Being, then such Being-towards-death is possible only as something *futural* [als *zukünftiges*], in the sense which we have now indicated, and which we have still to define more closely. By the term 'futural', we do not here have in view a 'now' which has *not yet* become 'actual' and which sometime *will be* for the first time. We have in view the coming [Kunft] in which Dasein, in its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, comes towards itself" (ibid., 373).

⁹⁸ Käufer, Stephan, "Temporality as the Ontological Sense of Care," in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time*, ed. Mark A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 356.

⁹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 377.

subjective; rather, it is something that realizes itself through itself.”¹⁰⁰ Time is, nevertheless, not independent of Dasein. It is in and through Dasein, understood as Care, that Time temporalizes itself. So as is to be expected in a fundamentally relational ontology, primordial Time is intimately and ontologically related to both Dasein and the world in such a way as to be neither subjective nor objective, and in primordial Time the *ecstases* are a unity, each entailing the other, although the future is given a primacy of place.

It would be difficult, and probably false, to understand Heidegger’s primordial Time as a First Principle in the Neoplatonic sense; nevertheless, there are some striking similarities which are worth noting. First, Time grounds the being of entities, and especially the Being of Dasein. It is the condition for Dasein’s possibility. Further, it has already been seen that according to Heidegger, Time is the meaning of the Being of Dasein. And Heidegger also states, “*time needs to be explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of Being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of Dasein, which understands Being.*”¹⁰¹ Second, at its core it is a differentiated unity and an undifferentiated multiplicity. The *ecstases* of future, the having been, and present are separate and not separate, distinct and indistinct, just as the relational First Principle—especially as understood in the Christian Neoplatonic tradition—is a differentiated unity which is distinct and indistinct. Third, as was also seen in the Christian Neoplatonists, while the Three Persons are united and indistinct (while also being distinct, of course), one, the Father, has a certain priority as the principle which is the source of the other two Persons. He begets the Son and proceeds the Spirit. Something similar is the case with Heidegger. While the *ecstases* are a unity, nevertheless one of them, the Future, has a certain priority from which the other two arise. Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, if eternity is understood as “timeless”, understood in the sense that all moments past, present, and future are unified such that there is no succession of moments in eternity, then Heidegger’s primordial Time seems to fit this understanding nicely, in which case Heidegger’s primordial Time would simply be the eternal which grounds Being as well as our experience of time as a succession of moments. Thus, time, as we understand and experience it, would be ontologically grounded upon the eternal. None of this

¹⁰⁰ Seyppel, Joachim H., “A Criticism of Heidegger’s Time Concept with Reference to Bergson’s “Durée”,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 10, no. 38 (1956): 504.

¹⁰¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 39.

is to suggest that Heidegger himself sees Time as a First Principle. There is nothing in the text that would in any but the most subtle and implicit manner suggest this. Yet there remain some intriguing similarities with the First Principle as conceived in relational thought which almost beg for speculative interpretation. Sontag notes, “If Being is first understood in terms of temporality, it will be difficult if not impossible later on to interpret God’s being in any other terms.”¹⁰²

Finally, Heidegger’s ontological understanding has implications for epistemology as well. Since in a relational ontology, entities are no longer ontologically independent, the problem of bridging an ontological gap in order to explain knowledge does not arise. Thus, knowledge is no longer about connecting two separated entities; rather, it is about epistemologically recognizing a union which is already ontologically there. As Gelven notes,

To-be-in-the-world is the ultimate presupposition of knowledge. (This puts ontology prior to epistemology—a move that incurs the wrath of all Neo-Kantians and positivists.) The bases of epistemology are the knower and the known: but prior to the distinction between knower and known (or subject and object) is the fact that the subject can relate to a known, which means that the presupposition of the very subject-object distinction is grounded in an already admitted basis of relationship—i.e., that the subject has a world in which the object can occur.¹⁰³

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger explains this in terms of “Understanding”, stating:

To say that in existing, Dasein is its “there”, is equivalent to saying that the world is ‘there’; its *Being-there* is Being-in. And the latter is likewise ‘there’, as that for the sake of which Dasein is. In the “for-the-sake-of-which”, existing Being-in-the-world is disclosed as such, and this disclosedness we have called “understanding”. In the understanding of the “for-the-sake-of-which”, the significance which is grounded therein, is disclosed along with it. The disclosedness of understanding, as the disclosedness of the “for-the-sake-of-which” and of significance equiprimordially, pertains to the entirety of Being-in-the-world.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Sontag, Frederick, “Heidegger, Time, and God,” *The Journal of Religion* 47, no. 4 (1967): 281.

¹⁰³ Gelven, *A Commentary on Heidegger’s Being and Time*, 60.

¹⁰⁴ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 182.

Understanding, for Heidegger, discloses the world as the “there” insofar as it is that “for-the-sake-of-which” Dasein is. For example, I (Dasein) can understand a hammer (world as “there”) as something I can use to accomplish certain ends (for-the-sake-of-which). In Understanding, therefore, the world is revealed as a realm of possible ends in which the hammer can be used to accomplish Dasein’s goals. Understanding thus discloses the world, that is, totality of referential relations, as possible ends, that is, those things for-the-sake-of-which Dasein can be, and these possibilities are possible ways in which Dasein can engage with the world. As has also been noted above, however, Dasein’s possibilities and the possibilities of things in the world are the flip side of each other; they correspond in a reciprocal way. Therefore, it is not only Dasein’s possibility for being which is disclosed in Understanding, but it is the possibility of things in the world as well. As noted above, “That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its *serviceability*, its *usability*, and its *detrimentality*,” but it is only because the ready-to-hand exists within a world of possibilities that it can be disclosed in service, use, etc.

Engaging with the ready-to-hand does not, however, simply disclose the possibilities of the ready-to-hand, it also manifests what the piece of equipment is. Heidegger states, “Equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example); but in such dealings an entity of this kind is not *grasped* thematically as an occurring Thing, nor is the equipment-structure known as such even in the using. The hammering does not simply have knowledge about the hammer’s character as equipment, but it has appropriated this equipment in a way which could not possibly be more suitable.”¹⁰⁵ This means that the ready-to-hand (equipment) shows itself *as* ready-to-hand in Dasein’s engagement with it; nevertheless, its ontological structure as ready-to-hand is not primordially revealed in such engagement. The ontological structure of the ready-to-hand, that is, that it is in a world of referential relations, is *already* revealed to Dasein in Dasein’s being-in-the-world prior to any engagement, and it is only because this readiness-to-hand has already been revealed that the entity *can* be engaged with. In the engagement, the ready-to-hand shows *itself*, not as ready-to-hand but rather as that which it is, for example, a hammer. The hammer is already understood as ready-to-hand prior to any engagement, but in the engagement, the hammer reveals itself *qua* hammer. This is the meaning of Heidegger’s

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 98.

statement that “equipment can genuinely show itself only in dealings cut to its own measure (hammering with a hammer, for example)”: in the engagement, the hammer is revealed not simply as equipment but as what it is, a hammer. That is to say, the essence of the hammer is revealed.

Because Understanding essentially grounds the possibility of Dasein to *engage* with the world, it has the structure of “projection”. It is insofar as Dasein can (and as Being-there always already has) put or throw itself into (pro-ject/*ent-werfen*) the world that Dasein can engage the possibilities both of itself and entities within-the-world. Heidegger states, “The understanding has in itself the existential structure which we call ‘*projection*’. With equal primordially the understanding projects Dasein’s Being both upon its ‘for-the-sake-of-which’ and upon significance, as the worldhood of its current world.”¹⁰⁶ This is not, however, a passive capacity for projection; rather, Dasein is always projecting itself in the world. Because Understanding has this existential structure of projection, it is always pressing forward into possibilities.¹⁰⁷ In Understanding, therefore, Dasein finds itself engaged with a world of possibilities. The world is a world with which it can interact. The world as the “for-the-sake-of-which” of Dasein is something in which Dasein can engage in purposeful activities. But in these purposeful activities, and thereby in Understanding, entities in the world are “interpreted” by Dasein, insofar as interpretation is, according to Heidegger, “the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding”.¹⁰⁸ It is in interpretation that entities are disclosed as what they are. Heidegger states, “That which is disclosed in understanding—that which is understood—is already accessible in such a way that its ‘as which’ can be made to stand out explicitly. The ‘as’ makes up the structure of the explicitness of something that is understood. It constitutes the interpretation. In dealing with what is environmentally ready-to-hand by interpreting it circumspectively, we ‘see’ [*sieht*] it *as* a table, a door, a carriage, or a bridge.”¹⁰⁹

From this it can be summarized that in Understanding, the essence, that is, the what-it-is, of entities is disclosed to and by Dasein. By engaging with entities in the world—an engagement that arises from the essential

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 184–185.

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger explains, “Why does the understanding ... always press forward into possibilities? It is because the understanding has in itself the existential structure which we call ‘*projection*’” (ibid.).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 189.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

possibilities which constitute Dasein, the world, and the ready-to-hand—Dasein discovers what an entity is for and thereby what an entity is. This disclosive Understanding is an activity of Dasein, but it is only possible in the world of significance, that is, in the referential relationships, within which things are found. Thus, Understanding, as the disclosure of what a thing is for and thereby what a thing is, is grounded upon the essential relationality at the heart of Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time*. As Heidegger notes, "In terms of the significance which is disclosed in understanding the world, concerned Being-alongside the ready-to-hand gives itself to understand whatever involvement that which is encountered can have."¹¹⁰ This interpretative disclosure of Understanding, however, is a non-discursive activity. It does not arise because Dasein reasons through a discursive process to reach a conclusion; rather, it simply occurs as Dasein actively engages with the world. It is not accidental that Heidegger uses the verb "to see" to describe interpretation's grasp of what a thing is: "we 'see' it *as* a table, a door, a carriage, or a bridge." In using a verb of "seeing" to describe Understanding, Heidegger is hearkening back to the classic nomenclature of "intuition" to designate that which is known non-discursively.¹¹¹ This non-discursive grasp is, as has been argued previously, only possible in an ontology which fundamentally and essentially connects knower and known.

In conclusion, a fundamental ontological relationality can be seen to lie at the core of Heidegger's metaphysical understanding in *Being and Time*, and this fundamental ontological relationality grounds and impacts all the most important concepts in *Being and Time*. The task that yet remains is to examine Heidegger's later work. Do we find this ontological relationality there as well?

DIE KEHRE: THE TURN

Much has been made of an alleged "Turn" in Heidegger's thought after *Being and Time*. As Hemming notes, "That the key to reading Heidegger is 'a' or 'the' 'turning' or 'reversal' has become a commonplace, so much

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ The word "intuition" comes from the Latin "intueor", which means "to look upon". (See Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary*, 991.)

so, that the ‘turn’ seems to have been with us from the very beginning.”¹¹² And Olafson states, “There is general agreement that Heidegger’s thought underwent significant change during the nineteen-thirties; and this view is supported by Heidegger’s own willingness to speak in terms of a Heidegger I who preceded this ‘turning’ and a Heidegger II who followed it.”¹¹³ However, this understanding of a Heidegger whose thought radically undergoes some kind of change is not unchallenged. Davis asserts, “The term *die Kehre*—‘the turn’—has an over-determined and complex history in Heidegger’s work and has led to major misunderstandings of his project ... It is not, as many think, the 1930s shift in Heidegger’s approach to his central topic. The *Kehre* in its basic and proper sense never ‘took place’, least of all in Heidegger’s thinking.”¹¹⁴ And Hemming himself is critical of the claim that there is a *Being and Time* Heidegger I distinct from a post-*Being and Time* Heidegger II.¹¹⁵ So what is the *Kehre*? How is it to be understood?

In his 1946 *Letter on “Humanism”*, Heidegger states:

If we understand what *Being and Time* calls “projection” as a representational positing, we take it to be an achievement of subjectivity and do not think it in the only way the “understanding of Being” in the context of the “existential analysis” of “being-in-the-world” can be thought—namely, as the ecstatic relation to the clearing of Being. *The adequate execution and completion of this other thinking that abandons subjectivity* is surely made more difficult by the fact that in the publication of *Being and Time* the third division of the first part, “Time and Being,” was held back (cf. *Being and Time*, p. 39 [GA 2 53]). *Here everything is reversed*. The division in question was held back because thinking failed in the adequate saying of this turning [*Kehre*] and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics. The lecture “On the Essence of Truth,” thought out and delivered in 1930 but not printed until 1943, provides a certain insight into the thinking of

¹¹²Hemming, Laurence Paul, “Speaking out of Turn: Martin Heidegger and *die Kehre*,” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 6, no. 3 (1998): 394.

¹¹³Olafson, Frederick A., *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 153. The distinction between a Heidegger I, the author of *Being and Time*, and Heidegger II, author of the later works, comes from Richardson (see Richardson, William J., *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2003), xxv.).

¹¹⁴Sheehan, Thomas, “The Turn,” in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret W. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2014), 82.

¹¹⁵Hemming, “Speaking out of Turn: Martin Heidegger and *die Kehre*,” 400ff.

the turning from “Being and Time” to “Time and Being.” *This turning is not a change of standpoint from Being and Time, but in it the thinking that was sought first arrives at the location of that dimension out of which Being and Time is experienced ...*¹¹⁶(emphasis added)

Here Heidegger does speak of a “reversal”, and with this “reversal”, he recognizes a change in his thought. In his preface to Richardson’s *Through Phenomenology to Thought*, Heidegger states, “The thinking of the reversal is a change in my thought” (emphasis in the translation). Importantly, however, the “change” is not a change in Heidegger’s understanding of the ideas in *Being and Time*: “But this change is not a consequence of altering the standpoint, much less of abandoning the fundamental issue, of *Being and Time*.”¹¹⁷ Thus, as Heidegger notes, the “turning” is a change, but a change which arrives at the fundamental experience which brought forth *Being and Time* and not a change in the fundamental ideas. So in what way is the *Kehre* a change? In the same preface, Heidegger notes,

The thinking of the reversal results from the fact that I stayed with the matter-for-thought [of] “Being and Time,” sc. by inquiring into that perspective which already in *Being and Time* (p. 39) [GA 2 53] was designated as “Time and Being.” The reversal is above all not an operation of interrogative thought; it is inherent in the very matter designated by the headings: “Being and Time,” “Time and Being.” For this reason, the passage cited from the “Letter on Humanism” reads: “Here the Whole is reversed.” “The Whole”: this means the matter [involved] in “Being and Time,” “Time and Being.” The reversal is in play within the matter itself.¹¹⁸

The *Kehre* is then a change, but it is a change that was already inherent in *Being and Time* from the start. It is a reversal that was already planned for the section of *Being and Time* called “Time and Being”. This “turn” is implied by the reversal of the title from “Being and Time” to “Time and Being”. It was never released because, as Heidegger notes, at the time he did not have the language to express it: “thinking failed in the adequate saying of this turning [*Kehre*] and did not succeed with the help of the language of metaphysics.”

¹¹⁶ Heidegger, *Pathmarks*, 249–250.

¹¹⁷ Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, xvi.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xvi, xviii.

So what is the *Kehre*? In what does the “change” or “reversal” consist of? It is important to note that, as Heidegger states, the *Kehre*, properly understood, “abandons subjectivity”. As was seen above, however, *Being and Time* is already an abandonment of subjectivity, and this abandonment of subjectivity constitutes the abandonment of a substance-based ontology, replacing it with a relational ontology. That is to say, subjectivity is abandoned in the very replacing of substance ontology with a relational ontology. Subjectivity loses its ontological significance once substance is no longer the ontological ground. If, therefore, the *Kehre* is, in negative terms, the abandonment of subjectivity, then in positive terms it should be the very ontological relationality that lies at the heart of *Being and Time*. Thus, the *Kehre* is not a radical departure from an original perspective for Heidegger, but rather a fuller expression or fulfillment of Heidegger’s thought, particularly the ontological relationality, in *Being and Time*. The question that arises then is: Is this what we find?

In order to discuss this question, it is first necessary to clarify Heidegger’s distinction between “Beyng” and “Being”. Regarding “Beyng”, Heidegger states, “The questioning of beyng out of the historicity of beyng is not an inversion of metaphysics; it is instead a de-cision as the projection of the ground of that difference to which even the inversion must adhere. Such projection brings this questioning altogether outside of that difference between beings and being. This questioning therefore now even writes being as ‘beyng,’ which is supposed to indicate that being is here no longer thought metaphysically.”¹¹⁹ For Heidegger, then, “Being” is written as “Beyng” to indicate that Being is no longer thought metaphysically, that is, to indicate “Being” as understood “outside of that difference between beings and being”. Beyng is not something different from Being, as Emad and Maly explain: “Heidegger uses the eighteenth-century orthography of *Sein*, i.e., *Seyn*, in order to indicate that, when he writes *Sein*, he means the way *Sein* is grasped metaphysically and, when he writes *Seyn*, he means the way *Sein* is no longer grasped metaphysically. In both cases, then, he is dealing with one and the same *Sein* and not, as it were, with *Sein* differentiated from *Seyn*: He intends no opposition.”¹²⁰ “Beyng”, therefore, is Being understood as the ultimate and primordial ontological ground.

¹¹⁹ Heidegger, Martin, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and Daniela Vallega-Neu (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 344.

¹²⁰ Heidegger, Martin, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), xxii.

Keeping this clarification in mind, it is now possible to address the question above.

In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger states, “Beyng needs humans in order to occur essentially, and humans belong to beyng so that they might fulfill their ultimate destiny as Da-sein ... *This oscillation of needing and belonging* constitutes beyng as event [*Ereignis*]”¹²¹ (emphasis in the translation). And slightly later he says, “The truth of being (and thus being itself) essentially occurs only where and when Da-sein occurs. Da-sein ‘is’ only where and when the being of truth occurs. A turning—indeed *the* turning—which indicates precisely the essence of being itself as the event [*Ereignis*] that oscillates in itself”¹²² (emphasis in the translation). This indicates that the *Kehre*, the “turning”, is the relation of the “needing” of Beyng for Dasein and the “belonging” of Dasein to Beyng.¹²³ Thus, Sheehan can say, “the turn is simply the bond between *Dasein* and *Sein*.”¹²⁴ The *Kehre* is, then, a reciprocal relationality between Beyng and Dasein, and thereby one can see the relationality inherent in Heidegger’s understanding of the *Kehre*.

¹²¹ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, 198.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 205–206.

¹²³ “Event (*Ereignis*)” is an important concept for Heidegger. While it lies far beyond our scope here to dive into all its complex implications, nevertheless, some explanation is necessary. *Ereignis* in vernacular German means “event”. Heidegger, however, as is typical of his thought, emphasizes the etymological roots to bring out a broader range of meanings. As Vallega-Neu explains, “*Ereignis* in German usually means ‘event’, but, as in many other instances, Heidegger likes to play with a wider semantic field that opens up once we hear the word more literally by breaking it up into its two semantic components *er-* and *-ignis*. The prefix *er-* carries the sense of a beginning motion or of an achievement, whereas *-ignis* refers to the word *eigen*, which in German usually means ‘own’, but which is also at play in a word that is familiar to us from Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, namely *eigentlich*, in English ‘proper’ or ‘authentic’. This has led scholars to translate *Ereignis* not only as ‘event’ but also with the neologism ‘enowning’, or as ‘appropriation’, or as ‘the event of appropriation’.” (Vallega-Neu, Daniela, “Ereignis: The Event of Appropriation,” in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret W. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2014), 140–141.) The quotes just cited in the body of the text above indicate that *Ereignis* is the “event” that indicates the relation between the “belonging” of Dasein and the “needing” of Beyng. In this light, *Ereignis* is a relational concept that indicates an inherent relationality between and within, that is, at the ontological ground of, Beyng and Dasein. For a more complete understanding of Heidegger’s use of *Ereignis*, see Vallega-Neu, Daniela “Ereignis: The Event of Appropriation”.

¹²⁴ Sheehan, “The Turn,” 82.

But the relationality of the *Kehre* is not only a relation of Beyng and Dasein; it is also a relation of Beyng and beings. Heidegger notes that there is an “excess” in the essence of Beyng, and according to Heidegger,

This excess [*Über-maß*] is not a mere quantitative surplus; it is instead the self-withdrawing of all quantification and measuring ... This excess is the self-withdrawing of *measuring out*, because it first lets arise and holds open the *strife* and thus also both the space of the strife and everything distant. The strife of beyng against beings, however, is this *self-concealment* of the restraint of an originary belonging.¹²⁵ (emphasis in the translation)

From the interrelationality of Beyng and Dasein, therefore, a further “strife” or “relation” between Beyng and beings arises. Heidegger goes on to note, “This distinction [the distinction between Beyng and beings] has been understood ever since *Being and Time* as the ‘ontological difference’.”¹²⁶ The self-concealment which arises from the excess of Being/Beyng must at the same time give rise to a parallel unconcealment of Being *in* beings. The very nature of an excess which self-conceals entails a remainder which does not exceed and so remains to be revealed in and by those very beings which it exceeds. Therefore, in the tension, in the relation, between Being and beings, a relation of concealment and unconcealment arises, and it arises from the “excess” of Being in relation to beings.¹²⁷ Insofar as it is through Being that beings have their being, they, beings, reveal and give presence to Being, that is, Being is unconcealed in beings; insofar, however, as beings are not Being, that is, Being itself is something more than any being, Being remains concealed and hidden.

Does this understanding carry through into Heidegger’s later thought though?

RELATIONALITY IN HEIDEGGER’S LATER THOUGHT

As was seen above, the *Kehre* in Heidegger is an abandonment of subjectivity. It has already been shown above that while Dasein might appear as a “transcendental subject” in *Being and Time*, this is, nevertheless, not the

¹²⁵ Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, 196.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹²⁷ I revert to the more usual designation of “Being” and “Being itself” instead of “Beyng” since Beyng is Being understood as ontological relation ground.

case. As Hemming notes, however, this abandonment of subjectivity was already present in Heidegger's thought before *Being and Time*:

Even if we were to concede that *Being and Time* does not sufficiently overcome the language of subjectivity (as Heidegger later implied), nevertheless it cannot be doubted that before the publication of *Being and Time*, Heidegger has this concern in view. As an example, in the 1925 lecture series regarded as preparatory to *Being and Time* and published as *History of the Concept of Time* Heidegger explicitly notes in a section entitled "The Exposition of Time Itself" that "*Dasein* ... is also *not* a subject or consciousness, which only incidentally provides itself with a world."¹²⁸ (emphasis in the original)

This abandonment of subjectivity as the ontological starting point for Heidegger is most pronounced in a concept which appears in his later work: the Four-fold.

Harman notes that the Four-fold is the "least understood and most neglected major concept" in Heidegger's thought, and adds, "Heideggerians have been so baffled by this strange four-fold that they usually ignore it completely."¹²⁹ Nevertheless, it is central to Heidegger's later thought and therefore must be explained. In the Four-fold, *Dasein* is no longer understood as the primary center where Being makes itself known; rather, *Dasein* (mortals) becomes one "corner" of a Four-fold structure by and within which Being both presences and conceals itself in beings.

Heidegger discusses the Four-fold most explicitly in his essay "The Thing": "Earth and sky, divinities and mortals dwell *together all at once*. These four, at one because of what they themselves are, belong together. Preceding everything that is present, they are enfolded into a single fourfold"¹³⁰ (emphasis in the translation). The Four-fold, then, is a relational differentiated unity/undifferentiated multiplicity. It is one and not

¹²⁸ Hemming, "Speaking out of Turn: Martin Heidegger and *die Kehre*," 399. The Heidegger quote can be found in Heidegger, Martin, *The History of the Concept of Time*, trans. Theodore Kisiel (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 305.—"Dasein is neither a combination of comportments nor a composite of body, soul, and spirit, so it is futile to search for the sense of the being of this unity of the composite. It is also *not* a subject or consciousness, which only incidentally provides itself with a world."

¹²⁹ Harman, Graham, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing* (Chicago: Open Court, 2007), 131.

¹³⁰ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 171.

one. It is a “single four-fold”. Further, it precedes everything present, that is, entities. And additionally, it ontologically grounds entities/things granting them their “thingness”, their essential nature. To demonstrate this, Heidegger offers the example of a jug. A jug holds (by taking into itself and keeping) water from a spring rising up from the rocks (earth), which spring is fed by rain (sky), and this water is poured out as a gift for mortals to drink and as a libation to the gods.¹³¹ Heidegger then says,

The gift of the outpouring stays the onefold of the fourfold of the four. And in the poured gift the jug presences as jug. The gift gathers what belongs to giving: the twofold containing [i.e., taking and keeping], the container, the void [i.e., the empty space which holds the water], and the outpouring as donation. What is gathered in the gift gathers itself in appropriately staying the fourfold. This manifold-simple gathering is the jug’s presencing. Our language denotes what a gathering *is* by an ancient word. That word is: thing. The jug’s presencing is the pure, giving gathering of the onefold fourfold into a single time-space, a single stay. The jug presences as a thing. The jug is the jug as a thing. But how does the thing presence? The thing things. Thinging gathers. Appropriating the fourfold, it gathers the fourfold’s stay, its while, into something that stays for a while: into this thing, that thing. The jug’s essential nature, its presencing, so experienced and thought of in these terms, is what we call *thing*. We are now thinking this word by way of the gathering-appropriating staying of the fourfold.¹³² (emphasis in the translation)

From this passage a number of significant insights can be drawn. First, the essence of an entity, a thing, arises from the Four-fold; the Four-fold, this single multiplicity, ontologically grounds the essence of entities. It is the gathering together of the Four-fold that gives the jug its jugness. Second, entities are not mere passive recipients of their being what they are. It is not merely the activity of the Four-fold which generates the essence of a thing as some entity ontologically independent of the Four-fold. The thing “gathers” the Four-fold. In a real sense, the thing makes itself a thing by appropriating the Four-fold into itself. There is a fundamental and primordial ontological unity between the Four-fold and the thing. The Four-fold *is* the entity’s essence, and the entity *is* the Four-fold gathered into itself. The jugness of the jug *is* the Four-fold gathered together.

¹³¹ Ibid., 169–171.

¹³² Ibid., 171–172.

There is and is not an ontological distinction between entity and its ontological ground. Mitchell notes, “There is no fourfold without the things that gather it into place.”¹³³ This is made clear by the fact that it is a thing that gathers or brings together the Four-fold. But Heidegger also notes, the Four-fold “precedes everything present”. This is no contradiction; rather, it is a recognition of the inherent ontological mutual relationality of the Four-fold, which gives essence to entities, and the entities, which gather the Four-fold into their essence. This, however, calls for more thorough examination.

It has been seen that the Four-fold is a one that is four, a unitary multiplicity. Thus, the four of the Four-fold cannot be understood as distinct entities. As Harman notes, “it is obvious that the four terms of the fourfold (earth, sky, gods, and mortals) cannot be referring to distinct *kinds* of objects. Heidegger has already said that each of the four terms mirrors all the others simultaneously. This means that the four terms are structures belonging to all things, not four separate types of things”¹³⁴ (emphasis in the original). And Mitchell states, “The four members of the fourfold do not precede it, they belong to it and only are what they are through their participation in it.”¹³⁵ The Four-fold, however, also indicates the “world”. In *The Thing* Heidegger notes, “None of the four [earth, sky, mortals, gods] insists on its own separate particularity. Rather, each is expropriated, within their mutual appropriation, into its own being. This expropriative appropriating is the mirror-play of the fourfold. Out of the four-fold, the simple onefold of the four is ventured. This appropriating mirror-play of the simple, onefold of earth and sky, divinities and mortals, we call the world.”¹³⁶ And later he states, “The unity of the fourfold is the fouring ... The fouring presences as the worlding of world ... The thing stays—gathers and unites—the fourfold. The thing things world. Each thing stays the fourfold into a happening of the simple oneness of world.”¹³⁷ Additionally, in the essay “Language”, Heidegger says, “The world grants to things their presence. Things bear world. World grants things.”¹³⁸ The world and

¹³³ Mitchell, Andrew J., “The Fourfold,” in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret W. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2014), 215.

¹³⁴ Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*, 132.

¹³⁵ Mitchell, Andrew J., *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 263.

¹³⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 177.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

Four-fold, therefore, are synonymous terms, and they function in the same way. The world grants things their presence, and as was seen above, the Four-fold grants things their presence. Things gather the Four-fold, and they “thing” a world. In “The Origin of the Work of Art”, Heidegger phrases it more simply: “The work as work sets up a world.”¹³⁹

Recalling that in *Being and Time* the world is referential relationality, it seems that the Four-fold, understood as “world”, would be referential relationality as well. And this is precisely what we see. It is in the interrelationality of the Four-fold that things are what they are, but things also bring together the Four-fold into its unity *as* Four-fold. The Four-fold is not ontologically independent of the thing; rather, it is in the thing’s gathering of the Four-fold that the Four-fold *is* the Four-fold. At the same time, however, it is the Four-fold that grants things their “thingness”. Mitchell notes, “The extrapolated thing extends beyond itself along the avenues of relation presented by the four members of the fourfold. Each of these grants the thing a place within a particular cluster of relations. The particular thing is a node for such relations.”¹⁴⁰ The Four-fold, then, is the relationality of the world, as we saw in *Being and Time*. The difference is that now, instead of the structure consisting of Dasein and World, Dasein (mortals) is shifted to the side along with gods, earth, and sky, and the whole of the Four-fold constitutes the world.

This is not as drastic a shift from *Being and Time* as it might seem, since even there, the world and Dasein co-constituted each other. Just as in *Being and Time* the relationality of world and Dasein make things what they are, in the later Heidegger, this same understanding is expressed in the poetical language of the thing thinging, the thing gathering the Four-fold, the world granting things, etc. In both cases it is an underlying ontological relationality which unifies and determines reality. In the later works, things are what they are within the relationality of the Four-fold in such a way that they are and are not the Four-fold, and in *Being and Time*, things are what they are in the relationality of Dasein/world in such a way that they *are not* without Dasein/world and Dasein/world *are not* without them. In *Being and Time* Dasein, world, and the ready-to-hand are all bound together in a web of ontological relationality, while in Heidegger’s later thought this web of ontological relationality consists of Four-fold (i.e., world including Dasein as mortals) and things.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 44.

¹⁴⁰ Mitchell, “The Fourfold,” 210.

This “are and are not” relationality between the thing and the Four-fold is discussed using more traditionally metaphysical terms in *Identity and Difference*. Here Heidegger discusses the relation of Being and beings. He states:

Being means always and everywhere: the Being of *beings* ... *Beings* means always and everywhere the beings of *Being* ... [W]hen we deal with the Being of beings and with the beings of Being, we deal in each case with a difference. Thus we think of Being rigorously only when we think of it in its difference with beings, and of beings in their difference with Being. The difference thus comes specifically into view. If we try to form a representational idea of it, we will at once be misled into conceiving of difference as a relation which our representing has added to Being and to beings. Thus the difference is reduced to a distinction, something made up by our understanding (*Verstand*). But if we assume that the difference is a contribution made by our representational thinking, the question arises: a contribution to what? One answers: to beings. Good. But what does that mean: “beings”? What else could it mean than: something that *is*? Thus we give to the supposed contribution, the representational idea of difference, a place within Being. But “Being” itself says: Being which is *beings*. Whenever we come to the place to which we were supposedly first bringing difference along as an alleged contribution, we always find that Being and beings in their difference are already there ... Being and beings are always found to be already there by virtue of and within the difference ... this thing that is called difference, we encounter it everywhere and always in the matter of thinking, in beings as such ... Unexpectedly it may happen that thinking finds itself called upon to ask: what does it say, this Being that is mentioned so often? If Being here shows itself concurrently as the Being of ..., thus in the genitive of the difference, then the preceding question is more properly: what do you make of the difference if Being as well as beings appear *by virtue of the difference*, each in its own way? To do justice to this question, we must first assume a proper position face to face with the difference. Such a confrontation becomes manifest to us once we accomplish the step back. While we are facing the difference, though by the step back we are already releasing it into that which gives thought, we can say: the Being of beings means Being which is beings. The “is” here speaks transitively, in transition. Being here becomes present in the manner of a transition to beings. But Being does not leave its own place and go over to beings, as though beings were first without Being and could be approached by Being subsequently. Being transits (that), comes unconcealingly over (that) which arrives as something of itself unconcealed only by that coming-over. Arrival means: to keep concealed in unconcealedness—to abide present in this keeping—to be a being. Being

shows itself as the unconcealing overwhelming. Beings as such appear in the manner of the arrival that keeps itself concealed in unconcealedness. Being in the sense of unconcealing overwhelming, and beings as such in the sense of arrival that keeps itself concealed, are present, and thus differentiated, by virtue of the Same, the differentiation. That differentiation alone grants and holds apart the “between,” in which the overwhelming and the arrival are held toward one another, are borne away from and toward each other. The difference of Being and beings, as the differentiation of overwhelming and arrival, is the perdurance (Austrag) of the two [Being and beings] in *unconcealing keeping in concealment*.¹⁴¹ (emphasis in the translation)

From this passage we can see that, according to Heidegger, there is a difference between Being and beings, and this difference is not something we add conceptually but a true ontological difference. At the same time, Being and beings are one: “[T]he Being of beings means Being which is beings.” The difference between Being and beings unifies them in that they both appear “by virtue of the difference”. Thus, Being and beings are both ontologically one and ontologically different, and in this undifferentiated difference/differentiated unity Being *is* beings in such a way that the “is” is an ontological relation between Being and beings. This “is” is the transition of Being into beings. That is to say, beings *are* the arrival of Being to beings. This transition, the arrival of Being to beings, unites beings with Being, but not, however, “as though beings were first without Being and could be approached by Being subsequently” And, it must be further noted, Being does not leave its difference from beings when it “arrives” to them: “Being does not leave its own place and go over to beings.” Being and beings are separated and yet united in the “is” by which Being is beings. In his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art”, Heidegger describes it thus: “That which is, the particular being, stands in Being.”¹⁴² It is not, therefore, the case that Being exists by itself and then gives rise to beings as if they were not before Being arrived. Because Being *is* beings there is no Being without beings, and there are no beings without Being. The ontological relationality here is clear. There is a difference, but this difference unites both Being and beings. It separates and brings together. This difference is therefore the unity of Being and beings; it belongs ontologically to both Being and beings. In his essay “The Essence of Truth”, Heidegger states, “Beyng is thought as the difference that

¹⁴¹ Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 61–65.

¹⁴² Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 51.

holds sway between Being and beings.”¹⁴³ This difference, then, is Being/Beyng as the ontologically relational ground of both Being and beings. This correlates with what was seen with the Four-fold above. Just as the Four-fold is and is not the “thing”, so also Being is and is not beings. And just as the Four-fold gives the “thing” its essence, its “thingness”, so Being gives beings their essence by giving them Being, that is, beings are beings by the “arrival” of Being.¹⁴⁴

Yet in the arrival or presencing of Being in the being, in the entity, something of Being remains hidden. As the quote above states, “The difference of Being and beings, as the differentiation of overwhelming and arrival, is the perdurance (Austrag) of the two [Being and beings] in *unconcealing keeping in concealment*.” The *difference* in both Being and beings entails, therefore, both concealing and revealing. This essential characteristic of Being and beings as an unconcealed concealment is not surprising. If Being and beings are different, then when Being appears in a being, there must remain something of Being that does not appear. Thus, in the being, Being appears and is unconcealed; yet Being is more than the being, that is, it “overwhelms” the being. In this way the entity, the being, is an unconcealed concealing, and Being is a concealed unconcealing. That is to say, in the entity Being appears and is hidden by the entity (since the entity is not Being), while in itself Being hides while appearing in the entity. And this relational differentiated unity is Beyng as the ultimate and primordial ontological ground.

For an entity to be, therefore, is for it to stand forth in a relation of concealed unconcealing, an apparent hiddenness. As just seen, however, the relationality of concealed and unconcealed also holds for Being itself. This relation of concealed and unconcealed holds for the Four-fold as well in the difference and unity of Four-fold/World and thing/being. The

¹⁴³ Heidegger, Martin, “The Essence of Truth,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 137.

¹⁴⁴ Later in *Identity and Difference* Heidegger describes difference as “the approach to their [Being’s and beings’] essences”: “What has been said holds true above all also for our attempt in the step back out of the oblivion of the difference as such, to think this difference as the perdurance of unconcealing overcoming and of self-keeping arrival. If we listen more closely, we shall realize, of course, that in this discussion about perdurance we have already allowed the essential past to speak inasmuch as we are thinking of unconcealing and keeping concealed, of transition (transcendence), and of arrival (presence). In fact, it may be that *this discussion, which assigns the difference of Being and beings to perdurance as the approach to their essence* even brings to light something all-pervading which pervades Being’s destiny from its beginning to its completion.” (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, 67.—emphasis added.)

difference which distinguishes and unites Being and beings and thereby brings forth the relation of concealment and unconcealment also shows forth in the difference between the Four-fold and thing. It was already seen above that the relation of Four-fold/world and thing/being is one in which the thing/being is and is not the Four-fold/world. Thus, the Four-fold/world and thing/being are different and not different at the same time, and it is in this difference that an openness arises in which both Four-fold/world and thing/being hold forth. As Heidegger notes in the essay “Language”,

For world and things do not subsist alongside one another. They penetrate each other. Thus the two traverse a middle. In it, they are at one. Thus at one they are intimate. The middle of the two is intimacy—in Latin, *inter*. The corresponding German word is *unter*, the English *inter-*. The intimacy of world and thing is not a fusion. Intimacy obtains only where the intimate—world and thing—divides itself cleanly and remains separated. In the midst of the two, in the between of world and thing, in their *inter*, division prevails: a *dif-ference*. The intimacy of world and thing is present in the separation of the between; it is present in the dif-ference. The word “difference” is now removed from its usual and customary usage. What it now names is not a generic concept for various kinds of differences. It exists only as this single difference. It is unique. Of itself, it holds apart the middle in and through which world and things are at one with each other. The intimacy of the dif-ference is the unifying element of the *diaphora*,¹⁴⁵ the carrying out that carries through. The dif-ference carries out world in its worlding, carries out things in their thinging. Thus carrying them out, it carries them toward one another. The dif-ference does not mediate after the fact by connecting world and things through a middle added on to them. Being the middle, it first determines world and things in their presence, i.e., in their being toward one another, whose unity it carries out. The word consequently no longer means a distinction established between objects only by our representations. Nor is it merely a relation obtaining between world and thing, so that a representation coming upon it can establish it. The difference is not abstracted from world and thing as their relationship after the fact. The dif-ference for world and thing *disclosingly appropriates* things into bearing a world; it *disclosingly appropriates* world into the granting of things. The dif-ference is neither distinction nor relation. The difference is, at most, dimension for world and thing. But in this case “dimension” also no longer

¹⁴⁵The Greek word “διαφορά” means both “moving hither and thither” and “difference”. (Liddell, *A Greek English Lexicon*, 418.)

means a precinct already present independently in which this or that comes to settle. The dif-ference is *the* dimension, insofar as it measures out, appor-tions, world and thing, each to its own. Its allotment of them first opens up the separateness and towardness of world and thing. Such an opening up is the way in which the dif-ference here spans the two. The difference, as the middle for world and things, metes out the measure of their presence. In the bidding that calls thing and world, what is really called is: the dif-ference.¹⁴⁶ (emphases in the translation)

Again, difference, for Heidegger, is not something other than Four-fold/world and thing/being, it is not something separate from world and thing in which both reside, neither is it something we abstract from world and thing; rather, it is the very relation in which they both are what they are, united and separate. It is a middle place, an open space, a dimension of world and thing which penetrates world and thing, holding them apart and bringing them together. It is what allows them to be what they are. In “The Origin of the Work of Art”, Heidegger notes, “In the midst of beings as a whole an open place occurs. There is a clearing, a lighting. Thought of in reference to what is, to beings, this clearing is in a greater degree than are beings. This open center is therefore not surrounded by what is; rather, the lighting center itself encircles all that is ... That which is can only be, as a being; if it stands within and stands out within what is lighted in this clearing.”¹⁴⁷ And he goes on to note, “Thanks to this clearing, beings are unconcealed in certain changing degrees. And yet a being can be *concealed*, too, only within the sphere of what is lighted. Each being we encounter and which encounters us keeps to this curious opposition of presence in that it always withholds itself at the same time in a concealedness. The clearing in which beings stand is in itself at the same time concealment”¹⁴⁸ (emphasis in the translation). Difference is, then, an open place, a clearing, in which beings and Being hold forth in appearance and concealment. It is the difference between Being and beings, between Four-fold/world and things, which is, as noted above in the citation from “The Essence of Truth”, Beyng itself. It is the place in the tension between Being and beings that allows beings to appear while yet remaining concealed, allows them to appear in their being while remaining concealed in their Being. They appear as entities, and they can so appear because they

¹⁴⁶ Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 199–200.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 51–52.

participate in Being and so *are*. They remain concealed because they are not Being itself but only manifest an aspect of Being. To cite, as an example, a hammer. A hammer appears as a hammer because it participates in Being. It is a being, but it conceals Being because it does not reveal all of Being, but only that aspect by which it appears as a hammer. In other words, it reveals Being as a hammer, but it conceals Being which is revealed in a saw. A chair reveals a part of Being that a dog does not. A cat reveals a part of Being that a car does not. All entities reveal Being in themselves while concealing Being as it is not in themselves. They reveal, or better abide in, a difference which both reveals and conceals themselves and Being. This difference, this Open, is the place where entities and world, beings and Being, things and Four-fold appear and are concealed. It is the tension between concealment and unconcealment. And as Beyng it is the primordial ontological relationality which grounds both Being and beings, world/Four-fold and things.¹⁴⁹

We have already seen the primordial ontological relationality which grounds Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time*, and from the above, it is possible to see the essential fundamental ontological relationality which grounds Heidegger's later metaphysics as well. The Four-fold/world is relational. It is a relationality of four nodes or terms which are separate yet not distinct. Yet it is a relationality which does not relate entities as relata separate from the relationality of the Four-fold/world. Rather, the related entities are themselves relational in that they are united with the Four-fold/world and at the same time unite the Four-fold/world in themselves. Things are not separate entities which find themselves related by something external. They are themselves relation and relational. As Mitchell says, "The fourfold constructs a relational thing, it renders things relational."¹⁵⁰ Finally, as was seen with our account of earlier relational ontologies, there is a purely relational tri-unity. For Heidegger, this tri-unity is Difference/Beyng, World/Four-fold/Being, and things/

¹⁴⁹ A question remains which lies outside our scope and is, additionally, too complicated to go into here: Why does Heidegger describe his ontology in terms of a *Four-fold*, and why are the four terms mortals, immortals, earth, and sky? The question is further complicated by the lack of explicit explanation by Heidegger. One is left, then, to speculate. For such speculation, see Harman, *Heidegger Explained: From Phenomenon to Thing*, 132–134. and Mitchell, "The Fourfold," 209–214. For more on the Four-fold in general, see Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*.

¹⁵⁰ Mitchell, *The Fourfold: Reading the Late Heidegger*, 213.

entities/beings. And from this fundamental tri-unity ontological relationality arises the dialectical reciprocity of concealedness and unconcealedness.¹⁵¹

CONCLUSION

As we saw at the beginning of the section on Heidegger, Nietzsche's nihilism, although completely misunderstood by Nietzsche himself, reveals an ontological truth. Nihilism is not "nothingness" but rather the "hidden" flip side of Being itself. The truth at the heart of nihilism is Being's withdrawal into concealment—a concealment which, for Heidegger, at the same time reveals. Thus, concealedness is the proper understanding of

¹⁵¹ It is not the task here to explore how Heidegger's relational ontology deals with temporal change; nevertheless, the dialectical relation of concealed and unconcealed offer some insights here. The very fact that entities always reveal a part but not all of Being, and Being is always revealed in while remaining concealed by entities, means that beings can change over time by concealing and revealing Being in different ways. In Heidegger's relational ontology, therefore, we can see an ontological union of entities which change and Being which remains unchanged in itself. Sikka understands "difference" in Heidegger differently. She states, "Heidegger thinks of this difference [between Being and beings] historically, as a destiny in which the members of the duality are interpreted in various ways over the course of time." (Sikka, Sonya, *Forms of Transcendence: Heidegger and Medieval Mystical Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 59.) The first thing to note in her assertion is that Difference is not a duality. Heidegger is clear that Difference is not something we abstract conceptually or representationally from two things. Difference has its own ontological status. It is both separate from and united in Being and beings. Thus, it forms a tri-unity and does not ground a duality. As to her claim that Heidegger understands Difference historically as the means by which Being and beings are interpreted differently over time, she is not alone. Dahlstrom also shares this view. He asserts, "Whereas 'being' (*Sein*) signifies the sense in which particular beings (*Seiendes*) are understood to be, 'beyng' (*Seyn*) refers to the event (*Ereignis*) in which that signification and understanding historically take hold—even if only to be forgotten or treated with indifference. The historical determination of an understanding of the being of beings arises out of the dynamic event of beyng taking hold of being-here (*Da-sein*), unfolding (*wesend*) but concealing itself in the process." (Dahlstrom, Daniel O., "Truth as *Alētheia* and the Clearing of Beyng," in *Martin Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret W. Davis (New York: Routledge, 2014), 120.) I think this is correct insofar as Difference allows Being and beings to be reveal themselves differently over time (since Being appears differently in beings over time), but to understand Difference in purely historical terms does a disservice to the complexity of Heidegger's understanding. In the end such claims must be understood as based on an Aristotelian understanding of relation which cannot understand a relationality that is ontologically prior to that which it relates. That is to say, Difference is understood relationally, but it is a relationality understood as grounded upon the relata, rather than as the relata grounded upon it.

nihilism, not as the end of metaphysics but as a crucial aspect of metaphysics. The problem for Nietzsche lay in the substance ontology of his metaphysical inheritance. As Heidegger notes, substance ontology destroys the phenomenon. It dis-integrates the entity. The different aspects of an entity, if they are real, are substantial, but if they are substantial, then they cannot hold together. The entity cannot be one. It loses its wholeness, its integrity. It dis-integrates. And in this dis-integration, Being is lost. Difference itself tears Being apart.

Heidegger's ontology rejects substantiality as the meaning of Being. Heidegger's ontology is grounded upon a relationality which pervades his thought. In *Being and Time*, this relationality manifests in the inherent ontological co-constitutionality of Dasein, world, and the ready-to-hand. In later Heidegger, it is grounded in what Heidegger calls "Beyng", or "Difference", which manifests in the concealed/unconcealed dialectic. Yet even in Heidegger's earlier thought, in *Being and Time*, this concealed/unconcealed dialectic can be found in a less explicit form: "What is it that by its very essence is *necessarily* the theme whenever we exhibit something *explicitly*? Manifestly, it is something that proximally and for the most part does *not* show itself at all: it is something that lies *hidden*, in contrast to that which proximally and for the most part does show itself; but at the same time it is something that belongs to what thus shows itself, and it belongs to it so essentially as to constitute its meaning and its ground."¹⁵²

While it is clear, then, that Heidegger's metaphysical understanding is grounded on an essential primordial relational ontology, to what extent, if any at all, is it legitimate to call it "Neoplatonic"? Heidegger himself hardly ever deals with Neoplatonism explicitly, and the one lecture in which he mentions Neoplatonism, *Augustine and Neoplatonism*, he never discusses Neoplatonism as such at all. As Hankey notes, "the most effective criticism of Heidegger's 'history' of metaphysics is that it leaves out Neoplatonism."¹⁵³ The influence, if there is any, is implicit at best. The question is, then, Can any, and if so what, influence from Neoplatonism be attributed to Heidegger?

Due to its similarity with the "inward" orientation of Neoplatonism, Schürmann states, "Heideggerian authenticity thus has undeniably

¹⁵² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 59.

¹⁵³ Hankey, Wayne J., "Why Heidegger's 'History' of Metaphysics is Dead," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (2004): 435.

Neoplatonic overtones.”¹⁵⁴ And while Hankey notes Heidegger’s neglect of Neoplatonism, he nevertheless asserts, “Heidegger’s account of Being beyond the difference of Being and beings resembles the Neoplatonic account of the One.”¹⁵⁵ So how is Heidegger’s metaphysical thought a reflection of Neoplatonism? In any Neoplatonic ontology there must be both a fundamental ontological difference between the First Principle and the beings which from it spring and, at the same time, a fundamental ontological union of the First Principle and the beings which from it spring. This Difference which simultaneously and ontologically differentiates and unites is precisely what we find in Heidegger’s thought. The dialectical play of concealedness and unconcealedness, of hiddenness and presence, which lies at the heart of Heidegger’s ontology, reflects the indeterminate determinateness, the One/not-One, the indistinct distinctness characteristic of Neoplatonic ontology.¹⁵⁶ Just as determinate entities arise from an indeterminately determinate First Principle in Neoplatonism, so also in Heidegger, “things” arise within the play of hiddenness and presence, that is, from the dialectical interjunction of Being/Difference, Being, and beings. In their determinateness, beings conceal that Being which exceeds them while also revealing that same Being by which they *are*. Simultaneously, in the indeterminateness of its excess in relation to determinate beings, Being conceals itself while also revealing itself in the beings which it grants to *Be*. And it is from within Difference, which lies at their heart and ontologically grounds both Being and beings, that this interplay of indeterminate/determinateness arises. As a final note, Heidegger’s ontology may not be as explicitly Neoplatonic as the Triune God of Christianity or the Plotinian One, but it is, nevertheless, a primordially relational ontology, an ontology in which an indeterminate ontological relationality grounds determinateness and not the other way

¹⁵⁴Schürmann, Reiner, “Neoplatonic Henology as an Overcoming of Metaphysics,” *Research in Phenomenology* 13 (1983): 29.

¹⁵⁵Hankey, “Why Heidegger’s “History” of Metaphysics is Dead,” 425.

¹⁵⁶This is particularly clear in Christian Neoplatonism where the Trinitarian God is, as we have seen, a distinct indistinctness and indistinct distinctness. In Plotinus and other Neoplatonists this indefinite definiteness and definite indefiniteness is less explicit but is, nevertheless, clearly seen in the indefinite One which is both One and Many, or determinate (as one) and indeterminate (as not-one). The Indefinite Dyad in Plotinus most clearly reflects this paradoxical relationality as Indefinite (and so indeterminate) and Dyad (and so two and determinate).

around. And this, as has been seen, is an essential aspect of any Neoplatonic ontology.

One might object that Heidegger confuses the ontological hierarchy in Neoplatonism by placing entities on the same ontological level as the First Principle, and so Heidegger's ontology fundamentally undermines an essential aspect of Neoplatonic thought, namely that entities fall below the First Principle. To some degree, this confusion exists within Neoplatonism too. Neoplatonism essentially has a single, albeit indeterminate, level of reality and all that exists only exists because it shares in the same undifferentiated First Principle. So beings are beings only by participating in, that is, by *being*, the First Principle. In whatever degree they differ from the First Principle, to that same degree they are essentially non-existent. It is because the First Principle is radically undifferentiated and indeterminate that beings, insofar as they are determinate and so differentiated from this indeterminate undifferentiated First Principle, fall below the First Principle. Heidegger, while not recognizing it as such, has a similar understanding in his account of *Beyng*/Difference, Being, and beings. Entities/beings have their beingness from Being, otherwise they are not; nevertheless, Being always remains aloof from beings, and so remains "above" them. Heidegger described it as an "over-coming". Being comes over to beings, while remaining in itself. In this way, beings are ontologically dependent on Being for their existence, while Being ontologically depends on beings for something to give Being to. Without giving Being to beings, there is no Being. This reciprocal dance takes place within Difference which unites and separates both.

Heidegger certainly does not recognize his metaphysics as Neoplatonic. It is possible he never even understood Neoplatonism. Hankey, citing Narbonne, states it is "beyond doubt that Heidegger misinterpreted Neoplatonism".¹⁵⁷ To suggest, however, that Heidegger had ontological insights which he failed to fully understand and struggled to articulate hardly seems provocative. As seen above in the quote from *Letter on "Humanism"*, Heidegger himself recognizes that in *Being and Time* his "thinking failed" to adequately express "that dimension out of which Being and Time is experienced". Furthermore, Barrett recounts a conversation with one of Heidegger's friends who told him, "one day when he [Heidegger's friend] visited Heidegger he found him reading one of [D. T.] Suzuki's books; 'If I understand this man correctly,' Heidegger

¹⁵⁷ Hankey, "Why Heidegger's "History" of Metaphysics is Dead," 429.

remarked, ‘this is what I have been trying to say in all my writings.’”¹⁵⁸ If, therefore, Heidegger’s statement is taken at face-value and Barrett is to be believed, then Heidegger himself recognized his struggle to fully understand and articulate his insights. Heidegger may have misunderstood Neoplatonism. He may have explicitly and consciously rejected it. Yet the influence and similarities remain.

¹⁵⁸ Suzuki, D. T., *Zen Buddhism: Selected Writings of D. T. Suzuki* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), xii.

Ἀποκατάστασις: “The End of the
Matter”



Conclusion

Heidegger is a re-turn, a turning back, an ἐπιστροφή, toward the relational ontology of Neoplatonism. He is not a full retrieval, a complete re-appropriation, but he turns toward. Like Nietzsche, he recognizes the metaphysical situation; unlike Nietzsche though, he sees a path forward for metaphysics, a path which, nevertheless, he was unable to articulate fully. The full recovery of all that a pure relational ontology entails, its fully Neoplatonic character, has not yet been realized. This task is yet to be accomplished. The dilemma arising from the ontology of substance yet remains a crisis. That is not to say the idea of relation as ontologically constitutive is entirely absent from contemporary philosophical thought. It is not. It appears most notably in Process Philosophy. The extent to which Process thought embraces a pure relationality as ontologically foundational, however, remains to be seen.

PROCESS THOUGHT

Process thought, like the Neoplatonic relational ontology described above, seeks to avoid the problems that arise from Aristotelian substance ontology. Describing Process thought, Rescher notes,

As is often the case in philosophy, the position at issue is best understood in terms of what it opposes. From the time of Aristotle, Western metaphysics has had a marked bias in favor of *things*. Aristotle's insistence on the

metaphysical centrality of ostensibly indicatable objects (with *tode ti* as a pointable—at *this*) made an enduring and far-reaching impact. In fact, it does not stretch matters unduly to say that the Aristotelian view of the primacy of substance and its ramifications (see *Metaphysics* IV, 2, 10003b6-11)—with its focus on midsize physical objects on the order of a rock, tree, cat, or human being—have proved to be decisive for much of Western philosophy.¹ (emphasis in the original)

This, however, only explains what Process Philosophy is not, but it does not reveal what Process Philosophy is. Rescher continues,

The concentration on perduring physical *things* as existents in nature slights the equally good claims of another ontological category, namely processes, events, occurrences items better indicated by verbs than by nouns. Clearly, storms and heat waves are every bit as real as dogs and oranges. Even on the surface of it, verbs have as good a claim to reality as nouns. For process theorists, *becoming* is no less important than *being*—but rather the reverse. The phenomenology of change is stressed precisely because the difference between a museum and the real world of an ever-changing nature is to be seen as crucial to our understanding of reality.² (emphasis in the original)

Niemoczynski asserts, “Any object-oriented ontology that sees already-individuated objects of the world as its sole focus misses out on what nature is: an ecological network of *processes, relationships*, and *agents* drawing on sources of generativity, including the ultimate a-temporal ground of *natura naturans* [nature naturing]”³ (emphasis in the original). And Whitehead, the pre-eminent process philosopher, states that in his “philosophy of organism” “the ‘substance-quality’ concept is avoided; and that morphological description is replaced by description of dynamic process ... The coherence, which the system [philosophy of organism] seeks to preserve, is the discovery that the process, or concrescence, of any one actual entity involves the other actual entities among its components. In this way the obvious solidarity of the world receives its explanation.”⁴ Thus, Process thought is an attempt to resolve the difficulties arising from a substance understanding of ontology, replacing it with a processual

¹ Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*, 4.

² Ibid.

³ Niemoczynski, “Ecology Re-naturalized,” 114.

⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 7.

understanding of reality. The heart of Process Philosophy is, therefore, an ontology of change or process. But how is “process” understood? What is it grounded upon?

Whitehead’s statement that “the process, or concrescence, of any one actual entity involves the other actual entities among its components” seems to reflect either the pure relationality we have been describing or at least the ontological co-constitutionality of basic elements, such as was seen with Heidegger. But is this the case? For Whitehead, process is grounded upon what he calls “actual entities”. What, however, are these “actual entities”?

According to Whitehead, “‘Actual entities’—also termed ‘actual occasions’—are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find anything more real.”⁵ It seems, then, that “actual entities/occasions” are substantial entities which lie at the foundation of reality, but this is too simplistic. “Actual entities”, as he later asserts, are understood in two ways: (1) as the “potentiality for ‘objectification’ in the becoming of other actual entities”, and (2) as “the process which constitutes its own becoming”.⁶ Through the process of becoming, then, “actual entities” constitute other entities as well as themselves. It is not, however, simply that “actual entities” are constituted by becoming; rather, “becoming” is what they *are*. He says, “*How* an actual entity *becomes* constitutes *what* that actual entity *is*,” so that the two descriptions of an actual entity are not independent. Its ‘being’ is constituted by its ‘becoming.’ This is the ‘principle of process’”⁷ (emphasis in the original). So the process of becoming constitutes *ontologically* both the actual entity itself as well as those entities which are made up of actual entities. As he clarifies, “it belongs to the nature of a ‘being’ that it is a potential for every ‘becoming.’”⁸ If, as has already been seen, what “actual entities” *are* is “how they become”, then how do “actual entities” become?

Whitehead asserts, “Each actual occasion has at the base of its own constitution the environment from which it springs.”⁹ So what is this environment? This environment is a nexus of “actual entities” called “events”. Defining “event”, he states, “I shall use the term ‘event’ in the more

⁵ Ibid., 18.

⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁹ Ibid., 206.

general sense of a nexus of actual occasions, inter-related in some determinate fashion in one extensive quantum. An actual occasion is the limiting type of an event with only one member.”¹⁰ Given that “extensive quantum” is identified with “Newton’s absolute place and absolute duration”,¹¹ it becomes clear that “events”, that is, this “nexus”, constitute the environment of actual entities determined by space and time. Whitehead later calls this the “actual world” of the “actual entity”: “Every nexus is a component nexus, first accomplished in some later phase of concrescence of an actual entity, and ever afterwards *having its status in actual worlds* as an unalterable fact, dated and located among the actual entities connected in itself”¹² (emphasis added). Thus, the “event”, as a “nexus of actual entities”, constitutes the actual world of an actual entity.

These “actual worlds”, however, have a crucial subjective determination. Whitehead says, “We thus arrive at the notion of the actual world of any actual entity, as a nexus *whose objectification constitutes the complete unity of objective datum for the physical feeling of that actual entity*. This actual entity is the original percipient of that nexus”¹³ (emphasis added). He further explains, “An actual occasion is analysable. The analysis discloses operations transforming entities which are individually alien into components of a complex which is concretely one. The term ‘feeling’ will be used as the generic description of such operations. We thus say that *an actual occasion is a concrescence effected by a process of feelings*”¹⁴ (emphasis added). The operations which create entities into a complex unity are, therefore, feelings, and according to Whitehead, there are two main types of “feelings”: “conceptual” and “simple causal”. He says, “Conceptual feelings and simple causal feelings constitute the two main species of ‘primary’ feelings. All other feelings of whatever complexity arise out of a process of integration which starts with a phase of these primary feelings.”¹⁵ All “actual entities” are effects of these two types of feelings, and each “actual entity” has aspects of both. Whitehead states,

In one aspect there is the origination of simple causal feelings; and in the other aspect there is the origination of conceptual feelings. These contrasted

¹⁰ Ibid., 73.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 230.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid., 211.

¹⁵ Ibid., 239.

aspects will be called the physical and the mental poles of an actual entity. No actual entity is devoid of either pole; though their relative importance differs in different actual entities.... Thus an actual entity is essentially dipolar, with its physical and mental poles; and even the physical world cannot be properly understood without reference to its other side, which is the complex of mental operations.¹⁶

For Whitehead, therefore, process is ultimately understood in terms of “feelings”. “Actual entities/occasions” arise and are constituted by feelings and the processes which give rise to them. An “actual entity” arises in an “actual world”, and each are effected by simple causal and conceptual feelings. This is true even of the physical world: “Physical science is the science investigating spatio-temporal and quantitative characteristics of simple physical feelings. The actual entities of the actual world are bound together in a nexus of these feelings.”¹⁷ Thus, as feelings arise, change, and pass away the “events” and “actual entities/occasions” effected by these feelings arise, change, and pass away. In the same way “worlds”, which are constituted by the nexus of these “events” and “actual entities/occasions”, themselves arise, change, and pass away. Mesle explains:

Everything is in process, becoming and perishing. But what kind of reality can become and perish? Events. The smallest events are momentary drops of experience or *feeling*. These are the building blocks of reality. Your mind, your flow of awareness, for example, is a series of such events. So, perhaps, is an electron or some smaller component of which an electron is composed. Your mind, and also any of the smallest units of existence like electrons or quarks, is a series of what Whitehead called “actual entities” or “actual occasions.” An actual entity is a drop or event of space-time; it is a drop of feeling.¹⁸ (emphasis in the original)

¹⁶Ibid. We can note from this that “simple causal feelings” are correlative to “physical feelings” while “conceptual feelings” are correlative to “mental operations”. Although, as Whitehead makes clear, “conceptual feelings do not necessarily involve consciousness; though there can be no conscious feelings which do not involve conceptual feelings as elements in the synthesis” (ibid.). This simply means, however, that there can be mental processes which do not involve conscious awareness.

¹⁷Ibid., 238.

¹⁸Mesle, C. Robert, *Process-Relational Philosophy: An Introduction to Alfred North Whitehead* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Press, 2008), 95.

To what extent, then, is Whitehead's Process Philosophy relational and thus free from the problems and conceptualizations of substantial ontology? The picture that arises from what has been seen above is one in which "actual entities" are singular "events" bound to each other as nodes in an interrelated web of complex "events". In this way they are dynamic and change as the "events" to which and in which they are related change. Nevertheless, this relationality is not a pure relationality such as we have understood it. Relation is still yet understood in Aristotelian terms as founded upon independent individual relata. "Actual entities" are atomic individuals which constitute reality. This is most clear in Whitehead's statement above that "an actual occasion is the limiting type of an event with only one member". These "actual entities/occasions" may be dynamic and change, but they do so as poles upon which change is grounded. As Sherburne notes, "The concept of an actual entity is the central concept in Whitehead's system. This system is atomistic—i.e., like Democritus, Whitehead conceives of the world as composed of a vast number of microcosmic entities. But whereas Democritus is a materialist and views his atoms as inert bits of stuff, Whitehead presents an organic philosophy—each one of his atoms, termed 'actual entities' or 'actual occasions,' is an organism that grows, matures, and perishes."¹⁹ As Mesle above affirmed, they are "drops of feeling".

However, there is a yet more fundamental issue. The "environment", the "actual world", from and in which "actual entities/occasions" arise is ultimately subjective. It is both physical, by virtue of simple causal feelings, and mental, by virtue of conceptual feelings, but in both cases, it is grounded upon the feelings of a percipient subject. This emphasis on subjectivity is what Whitehead calls a "reformed subjectivist principle".²⁰ As Hosinski explains, "the reformed subjectivist principle acknowledges that 'subjective experiencing is the primary metaphysical situation which is presented to metaphysics for analysis' (PR 160), but refuses to lose sight of the insistence of our common sense that our subjective experiencing is neither initially nor finally private, isolated, unrelated to the world about us."²¹ It is true, as Hosinski just noted, that Whitehead attempts to

¹⁹ Sherburne, Donald W., ed. *A Key to Whitehead's Process and Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 6.

²⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 157.

²¹ Hosinski, Thomas E., *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), 37.

universalize this subjectivity. He states, "But this nexus, as thus felt, can be abstracted from that particular percipient. It is the same nexus for all percipients which include those actual entities in their actual worlds."²² Nevertheless, in the final analysis Whitehead's "actual world" is ultimately determined and constituted by the feelings of a subjective "actual entity", albeit a subjectivity which, like Kant and Husserl before him, is putatively universal and so common to all subjects. Thus, reality is ultimately grounded upon the percipience of the subject. As Whitehead states, "For the philosophy of organism, *the percipient occasion* is its own standard of actuality. If in its knowledge other actual entities appear, it can only be because they conform to its standard of actuality"²³ (emphasis added). He goes so far as to assert, "For Descartes the word 'substance' is the equivalent of my phrase 'actual occasion.' I refrain from the term 'substance,' for one reason because it suggests the subject-predicate notion."²⁴ Whitehead says this because, according to him, "Descartes adopts the position that an act of experience is the primary type of actual occasion."²⁵ Later, he even asserts that it is "Descartes' discovery that subjective experiencing is the primary metaphysical situation which is presented to metaphysics for analysis".²⁶ Whitehead's ontology is clearly grounded in the subject and therefore, has yet to escape the conceptualizations or problems of substance ontology.

Rescher too sees the problems which arise from a substance ontology. He states, "The process philosopher has replaced a *horror vacui* with a *horror separationis*, being impelled by the paradoxes of Zeno into the conviction that once reality falls apart into disjointed discreteness, not all the king's horses and all the king's men can get it together again ... The contribution of the process idea is to help us to keep together in function things that thought inclines to separate in idea."²⁷ Thus, according to Rescher, "The contribution of the process idea is to help us to keep together in reality things that thought inclines to separate in idea."²⁸

So how does he understand "process"? He says, "Processes are correlated with occurrences or events: Processes always involve various events,

²² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 230.

²³ Ibid., 145.

²⁴ Ibid., 75.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid., 160.

²⁷ Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy*, 40.

²⁸ Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*, 24.

and events exist only in and through processes.”²⁹ He further clarifies, “Moreover, processes will always involve a variety of subordinate processes and events.”³⁰ This processual understanding, however, remains tied to the conceptualizations of substance ontology. Rescher states, “A process is a complex of occurrences—a *unity of distinct stages or phases; a process is always a matter of now this, now that*”³¹ (emphasis added). Thus, this understanding of process is grounded upon discrete and distinct “units” which, while nevertheless processes themselves, constitute the process. This “complex of occurrences” is not a discrete temporal moment, however. He notes, “Processes develop over time: any particular natural process combines existence in the present with tentacles that reach into the past and the future. Just as there can be no instantaneous vibration or drought, so there is no instantaneous process.”³² As can be seen then, even though processes are not “instantaneous” and entail a certain relationality of occurrences, Rescher nevertheless remains bound by the Aristotelian notion of relationality in which relation is grounded upon individuated *relata*. Rescher’s processes lie founded upon a “now this” and “now that” which ground change. Because processes are founded upon an individualized, and so substantially conceptualized, “this” and “that”, they must ever involve subordinate processes, and thus Rescher’s process understanding resolves into an infinite regress.

Niemoczynski’s understanding suffers the same fate. As seen in the quote above, according to Niemoczynski, nature or reality is a “network of processes, relationships, and agents”. This does entail a rejection of substantiality and individuality as ontologically grounding. He states, “The ultimate object of metaphysical speculation establishes whatever is in general and transcends particularity whatsoever.”³³ Thus, Niemoczynski’s metaphysics is not grounded upon metaphysical “objects”:

It is not advised to refer to the agents of the world as “objects” but as *processes*. Objectuality connotes deadness, inertness, utter particularity, and definiteness. The world is anything but. Lines of resistance, centerpoints of experience that span indefinite identity and scope, relations that traverse various boundaries, and the continual arising of possibilities and negation of

²⁹ Rescher, *Process Metaphysics: An Introduction to Process Philosophy*, 38.

³⁰ Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*, 23.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

³² *Ibid.*, 22.

³³ Niemoczynski, “Ecology Re-naturalized,” 116.

others, characterize a fluid, moving material-spiritual process. Embodiment is ecological in this way—it is spread out rather than internally centered at one stable fixed point. For this reason Corrington, following his teacher Justus Buchler, adopts the term “human process” to describe human beings, but the label could be applied to whatever agents are in question. All orders of the world are continually in process.³⁴ (emphasis in the original)

Thus, process is understood in a fundamentally relational manner. He continues,

Leibniz wrote in his *New Essays on Human Understanding* (1704), rebutting John Locke, that “relations are ... not foreign to the material to be known, but are organic to it.” These relations are internal and external: internal in the sense of temporality and an indefinite future self; and external in the sense of the aesthetic semiotic means of expression that communicate a becoming self that is in process to other becoming selves. External relations are multiple, however. As much as there is an inner expression to the world from within the creature taken to be an experiencing subject, *that* subject for example, there are, as Buchler describes it, “indefinite boundaries of the self.” Embodiment means a precarious life, one that is bound up with an environment, where there are no clear boundaries of where the self begins in its process of individuation, or where it ends, despite there being *that* self, individuated as a center of agency within the world. There is a certain permeability in the ecology of bodies given that agents are always located within webs of relations, and as much as they are subject to the internal temporal relations that shape who those agents shall become, external relations factor as well. If this is true, Corrington is right to say that individuation is “multi-layered.”³⁵

While relationality here is ontologically foundational, this relationality, the transcendence of particularity, is not a true pure relationality. It is rather a relational which is yet governed by Aristotelian conceptualizations. This relationality is one in which “all things are indefinitely *composite* as much as they are indefinitely *aggregate*”³⁶ (emphasis added). Thus, relationality is not a pure relationality but rather a relationality still founded upon discrete relata. Because of this, the result is an infinite regress. Niemoczynski states, “In a Russian doll nesting effect, natural complexes may belong to

³⁴Ibid., 118.

³⁵Ibid., 118–119.

³⁶Ibid., 119.

larger groupings or orders, and any natural complex (within an order) may, itself, serve as an order locating other complexities. So there are complexes within orders, and orders within complexes. *Reality becomes infinitely 'deep' and indefinitely 'broad'*"³⁷ (emphasis added).

Benjamin is yet more relational-oriented, focusing on the concept of relation more than process. In his *Towards a Relational Ontology*, he states, "The overriding position advanced throughout the varying engagements with texts and figures from the history of philosophy that form the basis of this book is that relationality is always primary and that it continues to appear in this way."³⁸ Regarding relationality, he says,

The truth of relationality inheres in what is always at work within relations, namely, the effective presence of a founding and irreducible plurality. Within the structure of this general argument, singular relations, which can be more accurately described as pragmatic occurrences within relationality, can only ever be secondary (and this is the case despite the possibility of attributing a form of originality to them). Such occurrences always depend upon the presence of an original form of multiplicity or plurality (even if the presence of the latter is not affirmed).³⁹

He further asserts, "Were singularity to precede relationality, then the truth of relationality would have already been provided. Its truth would be found in the coming into relation of two founding singularities."⁴⁰ For Benjamin, then, unity is founded upon relationality. This is remarkably close to our assertion that relationality must precede determinate relata. He even explicitly asserts, "Irreducibility is an essential part of relationality (in the way that the term is deployed here). If a relation is original, then there cannot be any element of the relation that precedes it."⁴¹ Benjamin seems to see a significant truth, a truth which requires the rejection and transcendence of the Aristotelian conception of relation as determined by relata. But what does constitute relationality according to Benjamin?

He states, "The founding singularity, given that it emerges as a putative possibility, will only ever have occurred after the event. The event in question is what is called henceforth a constituting 'plural event.' As a result,

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Benjamin, *Towards a Relational Ontology: Philosophy's Other Possibility*, 2.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1.

⁴¹ Ibid., 3.

the ‘plural event’ then becomes one of the names for the quality of this founding form of relationality. The plural event is that which allows for singularities.”⁴² It is here that a problem arises. He goes on to say,

The plural event refers to modes of existence (and thus to what is). The claim made in connection to a relational ontology pertains therefore to “being”—the domain of the ontological—and consequently the plurality in question refers neither to the hermeneutic nor to the interpretative, except to the extent that they are both effects of the ontological. Taken more broadly, what the reciprocity between the plural event and an occurrence entails—where the occurrence is understood as that which is what it is only after the event—is *that singularity is an after-effect*.⁴³ (emphasis added)

Further, “The concept of the ‘plural event’ ... plays a pivotal role in all of my work. It identifies an ontological position comprising a founding irreducibility. *What this means is that at the origin there is already more than one*”⁴⁴ (emphasis added).

From this it becomes clear that Benjamin has not yet fully left Aristotelian relationality and substantial conceptualizations behind. While relation is foundational, he still remains bound within the metaphysical tradition of substance ontology. A true relationally founded ontology must transcend the conceptions of one and many at its heart. By failing to see that these conceptions are themselves grounded in a substantial ontology, Benjamin ultimately fails to transcend substantiality, offering a relationality that is still bound by substance conceptualizations—albeit negatively insofar as it is defined as “not one”. This further entails that he has not yet come to terms with a relationality that is not Aristotelian, that is, not determined by *relata*, and so must understand relationality as a plurality that is prior to unity, rather than as an indefinite which is neither plural nor one (or, what amounts to the same thing, is both plural and one). He falls into neither of the traps that entangled Whitehead, Rescher, and Niemoczynski; nevertheless, by remaining within the realm of substantial thought, he fails to present a coherent articulation of a true ontological relationality, although some of the critical elements are there.

Any processual or dynamically changing understanding of reality will have a critical problem lying at its heart. If reality is grounded on a dynamic

⁴² Ibid., 2–3.

⁴³ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2 n. 1.

process of change, then this process must resolve in one of two ways. One possibility is that it may resolve into an infinite regress of change. “This” changed to “this” from “that”, which changed to this “that” from a different “that”, which changed to this different “that” from a further different “that”, etc. If reality is a process that must be constituted ontologically by processes, then these processes must be grounded upon further processes, which must be grounded upon further processes, to an infinite regress. And this is the problem which Rescher and Niemoczynski fall into. The alternative is that processes may resolve into some substantial entity which is individual and distinct in itself. This underlying substantial entity may change over time, but it is changed by factors which are ontologically external and not internal. This is the problem in Whitehead. Both of these problems arise because the conceptualizations of substance ontology, and with them the substance-based Aristotelian understanding of relationality, have not been overcome.

PERSONHOOD

Going back at least as far as Hegel, relationality also plays a significant role in the understanding of the Person. Hegel defines the subjectivity of the “I” as “self-related” and later identifies the “I” as “infinite self-relation”.⁴⁵ Kierkegaard notes, “A human being is spirit. But what is spirit? Spirit is the self. But what is the self? The self is *a relation that relates itself to itself or is the relation’s relating itself to itself in the relation*; the self is not the relation but is the relation’s relating itself to itself”⁴⁶ (emphasis added). Levinas identifies the subjectivity of the self as “for-another”, later describing *ipseity*, or selfhood, as a “folding back upon oneself”.⁴⁷ And finally, the contemporary philosopher Christos Yannaras states, “The word person is the linguistic term which I use to signify the subject not as an existential given in itself, but as an active fact of reference and relation, and at the same time as a ‘horizon’ manifesting the referentiality of existential things. The Greek word for ‘person,’ *prosopon*, is a compound word formed from the prefix *pros* (towards) and the noun *ops* (face) (*opos* in the genitive).

⁴⁵ Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind: Part 3 of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), 91, 244.

⁴⁶ Kierkegaard, Søren, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 13.

⁴⁷ Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997), 11, 110.

Person (*prosopon*) signifies a referential act.”⁴⁸ Yannaras even goes so far as to see relationality as ontologically constitutive of the “Causal Principle”, since the “Causal Principle is”, according to Yannaras, “personal”.⁴⁹ With the possible exception of Hegel, however, none of these philosophers extend ontological relationality to impersonal entities or “objects”, as Heidegger does by recognizing readiness-to-hand in contrast with presence-at-hand. Nevertheless, the roots of a true ontological relationality remain alive, and hopefully, one day its tree will bear fruit.

IMPLICATIONS

Such fruition would have significant implications for our understanding of the world. The implications for ethics seem most clear. If all is intimately connected on an ontological level, then any impact our actions have—whether directed at oneself or others, either living or non-living “others”—reach out to affect everything else around us. Nothing is discretely independent; therefore, any action an agent performs impacts everything else. Everything we do changes the world. Further, if on an ontological level I am constituted relationally to all things, then to be self-oriented, to focus on myself as an individual distinct from other things and to act in such a self-focused manner would be a violation of both what I am and what other things are. To be oriented toward my self and not toward the whole, and to act from self-interest rather than for the good of the whole, is a denial of reality. And thus, to so act would ontologically damage both myself and everything around me. Selfishness thus becomes the quintessence of evil.

There are implications from the epistemological perspective as well. Ever since Descartes, knowledge has been viewed in terms of some quality or qualities of a knower, a rational agent, some property or properties of a cognitive state. This explanation of knowledge, however, arises from a substance understanding in which the knower and known are ontologically separated. Substance ontology, however, renders knowledge impossible. Without a foundational ontological relation to the object of knowledge, there can be no knowledge. To know something is to epistemically connect with it, to come into epistemic contact with it. As long as there is no ontological relation, however, there can be no true

⁴⁸ Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, 136.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.

connection, no true bond, epistemic or otherwise. The knower will always remain separated from the known. Before any epistemic relation, there must be a primordial im-mediate ontological one. Any relation not founded upon such an ontological relationality is necessarily unreal. Knowledge, therefore, must be a connection, a union with reality, and cannot be reduced to the rational agent himself. It must be communion with the world and not some epistemic, as opposed to ontological, state of the knower.

The case is similar in regard to sensation. To sense something requires and manifests an underlying ontological union with that thing. To see something is a union with that which is seen. The color and shape perceived is a union with that in which the color and shape inhere. To hear something is a union with that which is heard. The sound perceived is a union with that from which the sound emanates. To touch something is a union with that which is felt. The texture perceived is a union with that in which the texture resides. So also for smell and taste. Such perceptions are only possible if there is a fundamental ontological relationality grounding both the perceiver and perceived.

On a final note, the problem with which metaphysics begins finds its resolution. The One and Many dilemma finds its solution in the fact that neither are ontologically primary. Both unity and multiplicity derive from a pure relational ontological indeterminateness, and so neither exists independently of the other. Thus, because reality is primordially and fundamentally relational, the relation of unity to multiplicity and vice versa ceases to be problematic.

CONCLUSION: "NOW ALL HAS BEEN HEARD"

As is appropriate to a truly relational ontology in which the beginning and the end are indistinctly distinct, the end ultimately comes back to the start. To move away from the ontological origin of reality is to move into unreality. All that is real, all that is true, must therefore come back. To remain in individuality is to remain lost, and so one must return. Re-turn back to its origin. It cannot find its true self otherwise. As is to be expected then, our conclusion, in order to find itself, in order to recognize its Truth, must reach back to where it began. "Now all has been heard; here is the end of the matter": In the beginning there was ... Relation. It must be so; otherwise there could be no thing at all.⁵⁰

⁵⁰The quote is from Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NIV-slightly emended).

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